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"THE VAMPIRE BAT!" EXCLAIMED BLOUNT, ECHOING THE WORDS
OF THE BO'SWAIN.

OR,
JOE PHENIX,
KING of DETECTIVES.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "THE WITCHES OF NEW YORK,"
"JOE PHENIX, THE POLICE SPY,"
"THE PHANTOM SPY," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEAD MAN.

It was a pleasant May night, the moon was up full and bright, and just as the clocks of the city marked the hour of twelve, the policeman, whose beat extended along Battery place, as the square is called, which bounds the Battery Park on the north, had his attention attracted to a strange sight.

He had been sauntering leisurely along, swinging his club after the fashion of his class, when his eyes fell upon the figure of a man, lying, extended at full length, in the center of the carriage-way which leads from Battery place to the emigrant headquarters in Castle Garden.

The Battery has woefully fallen from its high estate in these, our modern times. Once it was the fashionable breathing spot of New York; then, as the city expanded and the tide of wealth flowed up-town, the Battery Park, at the extreme southern end of Manhattan Island, commanding a magnificent view of the beautiful New York Bay, was for years neglected. Castle Garden, a round, wooden, castle-like building, on the sea front of the Park, once a popular place of amusement, able to boast that within its walls, Jenny Lind, the Swedish nightingale, first sung in the New World, is now transformed into a reception house for the adventuring souls who cross the seas to find a home in the land of the setting sun.

At such an early hour as the time of which we write, the streets were almost deserted, and so it happened that the policeman was the first to discover the man lying prostrate in the carriage-way, and he immediately jumped to the conclusion that it was some emigrant who had been taking a look at the wonderful sights of great Gotham, partaken of too much strong liquor, and, overcome by the potent fluid, had lain down in the street to sleep off the effects.

"Oh, murder! Isn't that a timperance lecture for yeess!" the officer exclaimed in a rich brogue which plainly betrayed his nativity. "I'll be afther runnin' him in, so as to give him a chance to pay for his night's lodging. Shure, five dollars is not bad for an illigant bed like that, patent pavement for a mattress and the whole of the beautiful sky for a blanket."

But when the vigilant guardian of the night came nearer to the supposed sleeper, he saw that it was no emigrant, for the man was dressed in an excellent suit of dark clothes, fashionably cut, and from his appearance looked like a well-to-do merchant. He was a tall, portly man, well advanced in years, with gray hair and a long beard of the same hue.

"Oho, upon my life this is no small fish!" muttered the policeman. "I'll get a carriage for him, send him to his house or hotel and then strike him while he gets sober for tin dollars for me trouble. For

"I'm a dandy cop of the Broadway squad," he hummed as he came up to the man and knelt down by his side.

The song, though, died away quickly when he placed his hand upon the stranger's person, for the purpose of rousing him, and peered into his face.

"Mother of Moses! if he isn't dead!" he cried, startled by the unexpected discovery.

The policeman was right; the man was dead and had apparently been so for some time, for the body was perfectly cold.

"Phat the devil is this anyway? Phat kilt the man?" queried the officer. "Has there been foul play—is it a murder?"

But no signs of violence met his eyes; the face of the dead man was as calm and peaceful as though he was only asleep, and his clothing was not disarranged. Only one suspicious fact the metropolitan noted; there were no articles of jewelry visible; no watch-chain, no studs, although there were eyelet holes in the shirt bosom, which seemed to indicate that the man had been in the habit of wearing such things.

The policeman cast a rapid glance around and then hastily examined the dead man's pockets, but his search was a fruitless one; there was absolutely nothing whatever in them.

"Bedad! some one has been here before me," the officer muttered. "That is suspicious! Be the powers! I believe the man was kilt by some murderin' thaves, but who in the world did the job?"

And as he put the question he looked wistfully around. He had not the slightest anticipation of seeing anything, and therefore was not at all prepared for a sight which for a moment froze him with horror.

When he had approached the motionless man there was not a living thing in sight. On the left hand rose the walls of Castle Garden and the low sheds appertaining thereto. In the center was the sea-wall, and beyond that the waters of the bay, wherein rode at anchor vessels of all nations. On the right was the building of the Iron Steamship Company, and the approach to this building was partially blocked by huge piles of freight, destined evidently for the Pennsylvania Railway's Freight Depot, which was the next building beyond.

As the policeman raised his head he looked directly at the huge pile of freight, and by the boxes stood a figure strange enough to startle almost any one, as it appeared, framed against the moon.

The officer, credulous and superstitious by nature, stared in alarm.

"Holy Moses! is it a man or a devil?" he cried.

It was no wonder that he asked the question, for at a distance the figure, though evidently that of a man, bore a striking resemblance to a huge bat, being attired entirely in black, wearing a long, old-fashioned circular cloak, and just as the officer caught sight of the man, he had raised and stretched out his arms, and the cloak being thus extended, looked exactly like a pair of huge wings, and as the man wore too a small, soft hat, pulled in chapeau fashion down over his eyes, so that it came to a point in front, it gave his head the appearance of the head of a bird of prey.

The officer rubbed his eyes as if to make sure he was awake. When he looked again the figure had disappeared.

"Bad cess to me!" he muttered, "if the baste didn't give me quite a turn! Upon me word, I would have taken me oath when I first saw it that it was a devil, but thin who iver saw a devil like that? or a man-a-galavanting round in sich a rig? Mebbe it was wan of thim frog-eating Frenchmen—they do be afther making monkeys of themselves."

Then dismissing the subject from his mind, he turned his attention to the dead man. He felt absolutely certain that he had been robbed, but whether before or after death was a question. As far as he could see, there wasn't the least sign to indicate that the man had been the victim of foul play, and the officer finally came to the conclusion that the stranger had died a natural death, being attacked by some fatal stroke on that very spot, and some night prowlers had discovered the body and removed the valuables.

"Upon me conscience!" the officer murmured, after completing his examination. "it's mighty odd

that I niver have the luck to pick up a boodle of this kind once in a while."

Then he proceeded to summon assistance; the body was removed and the coroner notified, and in due time the inquest held, and then came a startling discovery.

The man had been murdered!

Right over the heart was a stab wound, so slight that hardly a drop of blood had come from it, inflicted evidently by a dagger whose blade was very little larger than a good-sized knitting-needle; but the wielder of this toy-like instrument of death had such an accurate knowledge of the human form divine, and knew so well where to strike his blow, that the steel had penetrated right through the heart. And then, too, on the left side of the neck, right over the jugular vein and under the ear, were two little punctures, hardly large enough to be classed as wounds, and which looked exactly as if they had been made by the teeth of some small animal.

This was really a wonderful case, and yet in a great city like New York so many mysterious deaths are constantly happening that even this occurrence created but little wonder in the minds of the public at large.

The newspapers briefly reported and commented upon the affair—"mysterious death, murder evidently, where were the police, body unrecognized, something ought to be done"—and then the next day the matter was supplemented by some new horror, and the busy folks of New York forgot all about it. There were some exceptions to this rule, however. There was a man who after the lapse of a few days came forward and identified the body. One of the representative men of the city, this gentleman, by name Redmond Lamardale, a retired merchant, one of the millionaires of Gotham. The dead man was his brother Rufus, who had been engaged in business in Texas for some twenty years, and had come to New York on purpose to visit him, Redmond, whom he had not seen for years.

The New Yorker had been advised by letter that his long absent brother was on his way to the city, and when time passed on and he neither saw nor heard from him, he became alarmed, and some morbid impulse prompted him to visit the Morgue where the unclaimed dead bodies are kept on exhibition, and there he found the man he sought in the gray-bearded stranger.

CHAPTER II.

A CONSULTATION.

In the private office of the superintendent of the New York police, in the white-fronted building on Mulberry street, sat three men, who, from the nature of their position, were presented constantly to the public gaze.

One was the superintendent of police, another the Mayor of New York, and the third the Governor of the State.

The Governor and mayor had just entered the office, and had been received in due form by the police official, who, upon seeing his visitors, instantly suspected that something important had occasioned their visit.

The mayor plunged at once into the subject.

"We have called upon you, superintendent, in relation to this mysterious death of Mr. Rufus Lamardale," he said.

"His brother, Redmond Lamardale, is one of my most intimate friends," the Governor explained, "and I have promised to do all that I can to have the murderer, or murderers, of his brother brought to justice. He, himself, has not allowed the grass to grow under his feet in the matter. He has communicated with his brother's friends in Texas—he had no relatives there, being a bachelor—and has ascertained that when his brother started for New York he wore a heavy gold watch and chain, two valuable diamond studs, a diamond ring, and carried two or three hundred dollars in his pocketbook."

"None of which, if you remember, superintendent, were found upon his person," the mayor remarked.

"I remember, sir," replied the official. "In fact, there wasn't a single article of any description in his pockets. He had been completely stripped."

"What can be done, superintendent?" the Governor asked. "Money in this case is no object, you know. Mr. Redmond Lamardale is wealthy enough to be able to afford to spend a hundred thousand dollars to bring the assassins of his unfortunate brother to justice, and for the sake of the good name of the city which you watch over, Mr. Superintendent, you ought to use every possible means to detect and punish the perpetrators of such an atrocious crime."

"Yes, this affair comes right home to both the Governor and myself, the mayor added, "for while Mr. Redmond Lamardale is one of the Governor's oldest friends, he is also a neighbor of mine and I have known and esteemed him for years."

"Your Honor, I have been doing everything in my power to get at the authors of this crime," the superintendent replied, earnestly. "Not only because the mystery that surrounds the deed has excited my curiosity, and piqued me to action, but also for the reason that it is not the first time that this mysterious slayer has struck down his man right in the open street. This fact I have kept to myself for it isn't any use to make such a thing public, for if the newspapers got hold of it they undoubtedly would make a great row about the matter, thereby put the assassin on his guard and so make the task more difficult for the detectives. Just listen to these notes which I have jotted down in my private book."

Then the chief procured his note-book and read aloud.

"No. 1. Horace Derwentwater, English, elderly, a stranger, tourist, man of means, stopping at Brevoort House, found dead, Jan. 5th, four o'clock in the morning in Ninth street near Washington park, all valuables removed from person. No signs of violence apparent on body, at casual examination, but when stripped, death was found to have ensued from a wound made by a minute dagger piercing the heart. On the neck too, under the left ear, were two punctures seemingly made by a small pair of teeth."

Simultaneously the Governor and mayor uttered a cry of astonishment.

"The resemblance of that crime to this murder strikes you, I see," the superintendent remarked.

"All the circumstances are exactly the same, with the exception of the place where the body was found," the Governor replied.

"Yes, and the position in the street too, right in the middle of the roadway, as if the man had been assaulted in crossing the street, yet after a careful consultation with some of the most expert surgeons in the city, one and all assured me that it would not be possible, one time out of a thousand, for a man to inflict such a wound as caused death in these cases, unless the victim stood perfectly quiet, and then too, they were all of the opinion that the punctures in the neck were caused by the teeth of some small animal. Now, gentlemen, see how improbable it is that these tragedies occurring right in the public thoroughfares could take place without causing an alarm, even though at an hour when all the city is supposed to be asleep. But listen to the others." Then the official read his notes regarding three more cases, all alike in respect to the victims being elderly well-to-do men, strangers in the city, all killed by the same means, and all rifled of their valuables. One body was found in Madison avenue, just above Madison square, another in Wall street, a few doors from Broadway, and the third on Fifth avenue, within a stone's throw of the lower end of Central Park.

"You will perceive," the superintendent observed, when he had finished reading the notes, "that Mr. Rufus Lamardale is the fifth man who has fallen a victim to this notorious assassin, for that one man, and one man only, perpetrated these deeds of horror I feel quite certain. Another thing I feel sure of too, and that is, the murders were not committed in the places where the bodies were found. It is entirely beyond the bounds of probability for these murders to have been committed in such public places, even in the early hours of the morning when darkness shrouds the city, without exciting attention. My theory is that the victims were all decoyed to some isolated spot where, even if a struggle ensued, no alarm could be given, and there the deed was done."

"But then, why should the assassin take the trouble to deposit the bodies in these public places?" the Governor asked.

"That is one of the idiosyncrasies of crime," the chief answered. "I do not suppose, gentlemen, that you are aware of it, but I have a peculiar theory in regard to criminals, particularly those who commit great crimes. I think that all humans who sin against the laws of God and man, are in a measure diseased in their minds, not exactly lunatics, you know, but people whose heads are not well balanced. Now, in these cases, after the murders were committed, it was necessary for the assassin to get rid of the bodies; and let me tell you, gentlemen, that is no easy job in a big city like New York. Some of the most noted murders that the world has known have come to light through the attempt of the murderer to get rid of the remains of his victim. The depositing of the bodies in these public places, is pure bravado, a defiance to the authorities. The author of these deeds is no common criminal, but a man of brains who has turned his talents in a wrong direction; a monomaniac, in fact, for I cannot bring myself to believe that these murders are committed for the sole purpose of plunder, for I feel pretty well satisfied that in nearly all these cases, the victims' valuables could have been obtained without the robber being obliged to add murder to theft."

"The perpetrator of these mysterious murders is a sort of demon, then—a human fiend who kills for the pleasure of killing," the Governor observed, thoughtfully.

"The idea seems rather far-fetched," the mayor remarked; "his Honor" was noted for his practical ideas.

"Yes, your Honor, that is very true, but there is an old saying, you know, that 'truth is stranger than fiction,' and I think it is quite safe to say that the imagination of man cannot conceive of anything stranger than the acts that some humans will commit. Take the case of this mysterious assassin, for instance; why, the records of crime do not contain a stranger case; we must go back to the old story of the crimes of Margaret of Burgundy in La Tour de Nesle, as told by Victor Hugo, or the tale of the vampire, who prolonged his miserable existence by stealing from his victims the remnant of the life which in the course of nature they would have lived if their career had not been brought to an untimely end."

"The vampire, by Jove!" exclaimed the Governor, abruptly. "Of course, the idea is absurd, but don't these mysterious murders appear like the work of just such a creature, although I believe the vampire never took the trouble to drive a weapon through the heart of his victim."

"No, he bled them to death by biting them in the neck," the mayor remarked.

"The two little punctures in the neck of these victims would fill that bill," said the superintendent.

His visitors stared at each other for a moment, then looking at the official, shook their heads gravely.

"The idea is too steep for you to swallow eh?" asked the chief.

"Oh, yes, the days of vampires have passed away," the Governor observed.

"Yes, yes, you can't come any La Tour de Nesle business on us in New York," declared the mayor.

"Well, gentlemen, I have got a clew, and I will leave it to you to say if it don't have the smack of a vampire about it," and then the superintendent related how, in prying into the circumstances of the murder, he had extracted from the bull-headed policeman an account of the strange-looking figure which he had seen near the scene of the tragedy, and which at first he had taken to be a huge bat, at the same time never suspecting that it had aught to do with the dead man.

"Gentlemen, that bat, as the Irishman called it, is the party we want," the police chief said in conclusion; "and I have put some of my best men on his track, and whether he be man or devil, or vampire bat, I will bet a good, round sum that before a month is over I will have him safely locked up!"

Satisfied with this assurance the visitors departed, wondering greatly over the strange affair.

CHAPTER III.
A PRECIOUS PAIR.

Two young men sat in a cosy smoking-room of a sumptuous mansion on one of the fashionable cross streets of Murray Hill, as a part of the regions sacred to the golden kings of New York is often termed.

Strong contrast these two young men each to the other.

One was slender in build and short in stature, with an olive-tinged, foreign-looking face, peculiar eyes of uncertain hue, appearing gray at times and then dilating into jet black; hair as dark as the raven's wing, and curling in little crispy ringlets all over his head; the face was smoothly shaven and appeared effeminate, yet there were certain lines around the eyes and the thin-lipped, resolute mouth which contradicted the general appearance of the countenance.

This was the master of the mansion, Basilias Almayne, commonly called the "doctor," by his acquaintances from a tradition which said he had once studied for a doctor in foreign lands.

Almayne was commonly supposed to be very wealthy, although really the world at large knew but little about him. He had only resided in New York about a year, but had not experienced any difficulty in gaining an entree into society owing to the fact that he was well acquainted with some of the leading young men of the upper ten, whom he had met abroad. His story, as told them, in brief, was this:

Almayne was the only scion of an old Creole family, which had taken root years ago in Louisiana. He had never said much about his family, but from the fact that they were rich enough to send him to foreign lands to study for a doctor, and always kept him in funds so that he was able to gratify his slightest wish, his associates judged that the Almaynes were wealthy, and when studying in Europe young Almayne was, to use the language of his companions, "Satan's own boy!" The ring-leader of all the students in mischief and dissipation, it was often predicted that if the young Southerner did not die of drink he would get in some brawl which would end fatally for him.

As a student, Almayne easily held his own against his companions, for he was wonderfully gifted, and seemed to have the faculty of comprehending upon the instant what would cost another man hours of severe study.

In fact, he was a genius, all admitted that, and as more than one of his masters said, "he will be a great man one of these days, if he don't throw away his opportunities."

All of a sudden, right in the midst of his studies, Almayne was called home by the death of his mother, and none of his companions saw or heard aught of him until he appeared in New York. Then, in answer to their queries, he said all his relatives were dead, and being his own master, he had come to the only city in the New World worth living in to enjoy himself. From the style of the establishment which he set up, and the manner in which he conducted himself, it was apparent that he had plenty of money. He pursued no business, although often in jest he would declare that he was a better doctor than nine-tenths of those who won princely incomes by following that profession, and so among his associates he was generally termed "Doc" Almayne.

His companion was called Francis Culpepper, a medium-sized blonde youth, with a face, which, although fair to look upon, a good judge of mankind would not have been apt to form a favorable impression of.

This young gentleman, although not wealthy, moved in good society, for he came of an old family and was the cousin and confidential man of business of one of the richest men in the city, Redmond Lamardale, the retired banker.

Between Almayne and Culpepper a close intimacy existed, as will be perceived by what took place at this interview, the particulars of which we are about to relate.

"What is the matter; you seem out of sorts?" Almayne queried, after his visitor was comfortably seated and had his cigar in working order.

"There has enough happened to put me out of humor," the other replied, sulkily. "And I think that if you knew what I know, you wouldn't be in a very good humor yourself."

"Unfold yourself, although I doubt the truth of your statement, for I have such a deuced good opinion of myself, that it would take a great deal to worry me."

"Almayne, can I trust you?" cried the other, abruptly, and with a searching glance at the face of his host, who laughed at the inquiry.

"Well, as to that, Frank, my dear boy, you ought to be the best judge. You know what you can say and I don't, but if there is any doubt in your mind about the matter, give yourself the benefit of it and do not speak."

"Hang it, Doc, you and I ought to be in the same boat in this matter!"

"Yes, but, old fellow, two men can't very well pull together unless they have faith in each other; that is, to achieve anything, I mean."

"Well, you have as deep an interest in the matter as myself, and if you don't go in with me you are not the man I take you for. All I ask is for you to keep silent about the matter if you don't see your way clear to join me."

"All right, I give you my word that I will be as silent as the grave, so fire away!"

"In the first place let me get at your position. If I understand your game you are anxious to marry Miss Cassandra Lamardale, old Redmond's daughter and his heiress."

"I suppose I may as well own to that soft impeachment, though I trust you will do me the justice to believe that it is not altogether because Cassandra is an heiress that I am attracted."

"Oh, certainly; I understand that, but at the same time the fact that she is an heiress is no objection."

"Old fellow, with my expensive habits it would be sheer folly for me to pretend that a rich wife would not be a desirable thing for me to acquire, and I will go still further, Frank, and say that if Miss Cassandra had not been likely to come in for a good bit of money one of these days, it is not likely that I should have ever troubled my head about her, beautiful and attractive as she is."

"You know that the lady doesn't regard you with

a favorable eye, and that if you win her consent it will be because she yields to her father's request."

"Oh, yes; she doesn't particularly fancy me, but then she isn't in love with any one else, and believes that she never will be, and so is not so much averse to marrying me as under other circumstances she might be."

"Now, then, I will come directly to the point. You know Batterhofer, the lawyer?"

The other nodded.

"He is Lamardale's adviser, and when the old gentleman announced at lunch to-day that Batterhofer was coming to see him on important business, my curiosity was excited and I determined to know what took place at the interview, for I will own frankly I am deeply interested. I am about the only relative, with the exception of his daughter, that the old man has, and I have always understood that at his death I was to be well remembered."

"The lawyer came in reference to the old man's will, as I suspected; I managed to overhear every word of the conversation, and now, prepare to be astonished! Cassandra is not Lamardale's daughter, but an adopted child, and at his death she is to receive only a small part of his fortune, and that so tied up that the interest alone will come to her; a few thousand dollars are left to me, also invested so that I cannot touch the principal—curse the old scoundrel; you see he doesn't trust me after all these years!"

"Too bad," and Almayne shook his head; but there was a look in his eyes which seemed to say that he did not wonder at it.

"And the rest of his fortune, his millions daily growing larger and larger, what do you suppose is to become of them?"

"I haven't an idea, unless like many another old man in his dotage he is going to make up for the sins of his youth by giving money to some charitable purpose."

"No, crossing from England to this country, on the seas at this present moment, an emigrant passenger, is a young girl, without parents, without a living relative in the world, as far as she knows; she is called Lesbia Mardol; she is to be received by the old lawyer, who was charged with the task of bringing her to this country, Lamardale providing the money. The girl thinks that some friends of her dead father, moved by charity, have brought her over, and she comes here to earn her living. The lawyer is to find a place for her, she is to be put on probation, the fact being carefully concealed from her; Lamardale is to keep careful watch of her, and if she comes up to his anticipations, she is to be his heiress."

"The deuce you say!" cried Almayne, startled by this intelligence. "Why, what on earth put the idea into his head? What is the girl to him?"

"Nothing at all; she is an entire stranger; he has never even seen her. Why, Batterhofer, who as a general rule is not in the least curious, was amazed at the strangeness of the affair, but Lamardale said he had good reason for his action, and that in time he would explain."

"I'll bet a trifle that the old man means to marry the girl."

"My own idea, exactly, for he said she was a beauty, and splendidly educated."

"What steamer is she on?"

"The City of Chester, due here next Monday. Now then, if the old man likes the girl after she arrives, and carries out this idea, good-by both to your hopes and mine."

"We must keep a watch on the parties; the stake is worth some little trickery."

"You will go in with me then to put a spoke in the old man's wheel?"

"Oh, yes, for I want Cassandra, and I want a fortune with her too. There are plenty of tools to be found in a city like this who for money will do anything. We will watch events, and when the time comes be prepared to interfere."

And so the compact was made; two strong men against an old man and an innocent young girl.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EMIGRANT GIRL.

PROMPTLY upon the date that she was expected, the City of Chester made her appearance in New York harbor; only, being detained somewhat by fog, she arrived in the evening instead of the morning, and so she came to anchor off quarantine, at which the passengers grumbled loudly, for one and all were impatient to reach the shore.

But it was not to be, and they were forced to content themselves with gazing at the dark outlines of Staten Island, rising plainly visible in the bright moonlight.

Among the steerage passengers, leaning over the bulwarks and looking at the distant lights, visible here and there upon the crest of Staten Island, was a young girl, who was so beautiful that she had attracted much attention during the voyage.

This was Lesbia Mardol, the girl referred to by the two plotters in our last chapter.

In figure she was about the medium size, most exquisitely formed, and with a face of rare beauty, being pure Greek, a perfect oval, and lit up by as handsome a pair of great, brown eyes as ever dwelt in a woman's head.

She was plainly dressed, yet very lady-like in appearance, quite reserved in her manners, and so different from the usual run of single young girls who cross the ocean to seek a new life, that all of the officers of the ship who came in contact with her unanimously agreed that she was far more fitted to shine in the cabin than any lady on board of the ship. All wondered that such a girl should be obliged to cross the ocean alone, and in the steerage; but she had such a quiet, dignified way with her, that no one cared to run the risk of offending her by questions.

The third officer, a good-looking, blue-eyed blonde fellow, was especially interested in the girl, and late on this particular evening happening to come across her, still gazing over the stern bulwarks at the distant land, he plucked up courage to say a few words.

They were almost alone on the deck, nearly all the passengers having gone below.

"It's a fine night, Miss Mardol," he remarked, as he came up to where she stood, wrapped in dreamy meditation.

"Yes, very pleasant, Mr. Blount."

The officer answered to the name of James Blount. "You will be glad enough to get on shore to-morrow, I suppose," he remarked.

"I shall not be very sorry, although the trip has been a pleasant one."

Blount hesitated and fidgeted about in an awkward way for a moment, and then said:

"I hope you will not think me inquisitive, but I suppose you have friends on shore ready to meet you?"

"Friends," and there was a mournful tone in her voice as she spoke, and her eyes had a vacant look as she gazed upon the waste of waters, "yes, I suppose so, although as yet they are strangers to me."

"Oh, I thought it likely that you had relatives on this side of the water."

"I haven't a relative in the wide world that I know of, and I do not really think that any exist."

"All alone in the world?"

"Yes; although perhaps I ought not to say that, for these strangers who have caused me to come across the ocean are acting like true friends; and as I have not had many so far in my life, perhaps fate designs to make up for the past by providing me with plenty in the future."

"Well, Miss Mardol, if you will allow me, I should like to be ranked among your friends in the time to come, although now I am merely an acquaintance. This is my last trip on the steamer; I am about to embark in business on shore in New York. This will be my address hereafter, and if at any time I can be of any assistance to you, I hope you will not neglect to call upon me," and he handed her a card.

She placed it in her pocket-book, thanking him for the offer, which, in her present condition, affected her more than she cared to manifest.

"Yes, I am tired of a roving life, and have determined to settle down," he said. "I have secured a good business opening, and I think the chances are that I shall prosper."

"I am sure, I hope so!" Miss Mardol exclaimed, and this was no mere empty compliment; for the kindness of the young man had made a deep impression upon her, and her wish for his success was sincere.

"What land call you that, sir?" asked a rather harsh voice at the ear of Blount; and turning, he beheld one of the steerage passengers, all muffled up in a long old-fashioned cloak, and with a slouch hat pulled well down over his ears. In addition to the cloak, he had a woolen comforter wrapped around his neck just as though he was cold, although the air was balmy and spring-like as became a pleasant May evening.

In person, the man was under the medium size, with a swarthy face fringed by coarse, black hair worn quite long; a stubby, brown-black beard covered his chin, and altogether he presented a brigand-like, although picturesque appearance.

"That is Staten Island," responded Blount, taking a good look at the man, for he did not remember ever having seen him before, which he thought was strange, for he had an excellent memory for faces, and rather prided himself upon the fact. Then, too, the face of the man was an odd one—a face that once seen would not be apt to be forgotten.

"Staten Island," remarked the man in a reflective sort of way; "that is not ze New York then?"

"No; the city lies further up the bay. But you will excuse my curiosity, I trust—where on earth have you kept yourself during this voyage? I do not remember to have seen you; but you are a passenger, of course."

"Oh, no; I have just dropped from ze clouds!" responded the man with a laugh, speaking in a pleasant, flexible voice, now strangely at variance with his rough, uncouth appearance; and from the slight accent which there was to his speech, Blount came to the conclusion that he was a foreigner—either a Frenchman or an Italian.

"By Jove! I must say I don't seem to remember you any more than if you did; and it's deuced odd, for we haven't a large passenger list this trip, and I didn't think there was a person on board of the ship whom I hadn't seen."

"Oh, you saw me often enough, sir, at the beginning of ze trip, but after ze first day I was attacked by ze dreadful sea malady and sought 'ze seclusion which ze cabin grants,' as your devine singers say in ze Pinafore."

The man was a gentleman, evidently, despite the fact that no one would have taken him to be one from his personal appearance; but, somehow, a strange doubt had seized upon Blount; he felt a sudden and most decided aversion to the man, and he could not get the impression out of his mind that, notwithstanding the assertion to the contrary, he had never set eyes upon his face before.

"How may I call your name, sir?" he asked, plainly betraying by his face that he regarded the other with suspicion.

"Leon Du Claire."

"You are a Frenchman, I presume?"

"A French Italian," responded the man, with that peculiar shrug of the shoulders so common to the Latin races. "French by descent, but born and reared in Italy."

Blount had watched the stranger with an earnest eye, and the more he saw of him the more convinced he became that he had never set eyes upon the man before. He was not a passenger, for if he had been, Blount knew that he most certainly would have seen him. How, then, was it that he came to be on board the steamer? He could not very well have dropped from the clouds, as he asserted, although it was possible that he could have gained access to the deck of the steamer by taking advantage of the darkness and coming alongside in a small boat; but then what game was the man up to that he should take such a course? There wasn't anything to be gained by so doing, as far as Blount could see, and he finally came to the conclusion that the fellow was a stowaway, that is, he had stolen on board the steamer without a ticket before she left England, and had managed in some mysterious manner to conceal himself among the freight and live through the voyage. Such a thing had been done, but very rarely, for after a day or two in the dark hold the stowaways were generally glad to sneak out and throw themselves upon the mercy of the captain of the ship.

If the man was a stowaway, he had apparently managed to endure the voyage about as well as any body on board, and Blount's curiosity was so

cited by this strange circumstance that he determined to go instantly and examine the passenger lists and see if any such name was registered as the man had given, but without any intention of working harm to the stranger; for as long as the voyage was ended, and he was on this side of the water, it didn't matter materially how he had managed to get across.

"I imagined that you were either a Frenchman or an Italian from the way you spoke," Blount observed, and, with a remark about the beauty of the night, he sauntered away.

"How strange are these English-speaking people," the man in the cloak mused, speaking apparently to himself, and yet loud enough so the girl could hear every word. "He doubts my statement; he thinks that I have fallen from ze sky, or else risen out of ze sea, and, in order to satisfy himself, he has gone to examine ze passenger lists, so as to discover whether I have spoken the truth or not, and how disappointed he will be when he ascertains that I am right in my account and he is weak in ze head for harboring such an idea. Ah! this world! what a strange world it is, eh, mademoiselle? Think how we poor humans go through life ever on ze watch against each other!"

"Oh, I think you are wrong in your surmise," the girl replied, puzzled by the man's manner, and half suspecting that he was not quite right in his mind.

"No, no! I am correct as sure as that light burns yonder on ze land!"

Lesbia looked in the direction indicated, and then the man suddenly threw his arms around her, pressed one hand over her mouth, and, with the other, applied a sponge saturated with some strange smelling liquid, to her nostrils. She was in the toils.

CHAPTER V. THE PURSUIT.

LESBIA MARDOL was so taken by surprise, so thoroughly helpless in the strong arms of her assailant, who seemed to be possessed of demoniac strength, that she could neither scream nor struggle before the strong liquid with which the sponge was saturated, stole away her senses. Her brain whirled; there seemed to be a gigantic wheel revolving within her head, and then, all of a sudden, the wheel burst with a brilliant shower of sparks, and she sunk into insensibility.

The moment he discovered, by the limpness of the girl's form, that her senses were stupefied, the assailant carefully laid her upon the planks at his feet; the deck was deserted, and he had taken advantage of the favorable opportunity.

There was no time to be lost, though, and this the fellow knew right well; although the night was well on, some of the passengers or crew were likely to make their appearance at any moment.

After relieving himself of the incumbrance of the girl he drew from beneath his cloak a stout rope, with a carefully made loop in one end. This he passed around the girl's body, and then, fastening the other end to one of the stern posts of the steamer, he carefully lowered the insensible girl into a small boat, which floated on the tide under the ship's stern, attached to the rudder.

The bay was like a sheet of glass and the tide, just at its height, was at the slack-water period so that the maneuver was not so difficult as it might have been under other circumstances.

When the insensible girl was safely deposited in the boat, with the agility of a sailor, or an acrobat, the man descended the rope hand over hand; drew out his knife and with a single slash severed it; and just at that moment the tide turned, and the flood which had filled up the inner bay, again sought the sea; the boat floated away from the steamer and headed toward Sandy Hook.

The craft, though a small one, was a regularly-built keel-boat, well suited to stand rough weather, and fitted with a sail; and after adjusting the girl in a comfortable position forward, the adventurer proceeded to get the sail up.

"That cursed officer suspected that I was up to some game and had made up his mind to spoil it, but I was quicker about the work than he anticipated, and now let him interfere with me if he can!" he muttered.

Shaking the sail out, he turned around and defiantly shook his fist at the steamer as he took his place at the stern and with his other hand grasped the rudder.

A cry of alarm coming from the deck of the City of Chester answered his defiance.

Blount had examined the passenger lists, and not finding any name upon them at all like Leon Du Claire, had returned to the deck to force the stranger to an explanation; and when he arrived there, finding that it was deserted, his attention was attracted first to the rope and then to the boat drifting seaward, for the wind was light and the little craft had not yet felt the influence of the sail.

The boat was still near enough to enable the young man to distinguish the figures in it, and when he saw the girl, lying motionless in the forward part, and the dark figure of the stranger at the helm, he immediately comprehended the greater part of what had occurred.

"The scoundrel came on board by means of that boat!" he cried. "What a fool I was not to look over the stern when my suspicions became aroused! The girl seems to be insensible! What vile plot is this?"

And then in hot haste Blount hurried to the captain of the steamer and related what had occurred.

The indignation of that gentleman was unbounded. "What!" he cried, "one of my passengers abducted from my very ship? If that isn't the coolest piece of rascality that I think I ever heard of since I breathed the breath of life! Why, hang the fellow's assurance! These New York vessels will be trying to steal the steamer next from right under my feet. Get a boat out immediately and give chase; there's very little wind to-night and the chances are good that you will be able to overtake the scoundrel! Take command of the boat, Mr. Blount, and don't give up the chase until you have secured the rascal!"

The young man whose feelings were deeply interested on behalf of the girl, needed no second command, and at once hurried away.

The discipline enforced on board the City of Chester, was excellent, and in a remarkably short time

an eight-oared boat was in the water, and Blount was cheering his men on in the chase.

The sailors bent to the oars with hearty good-will, for there was something exciting about such a pursuit, and then the boldness of the deed roused their curiosity, so that they were eager to come to close quarters with the scamp, audacious enough to so defy the law.

Thanks to the delay occasioned by the mustering of the crew, and putting the boat into the water, the unknown had managed to secure about a mile's start, but as the breeze was light, hardly strong enough to ruffle the surface of the water, for the eight-oared boat to overtake the other craft, although the fugitive had the advantage of a sail, did not appear to be at all improbable.

"Give way with a will, men!" Blount cried. "We'll soon be up to him unless the wind rises."

The oldest man in the boat, the bo'swain, a brawny, weather-beaten old salt, who pulled stroke, and whom the rest looked upon as an oracle, shook his head in a dubious sort of way as he glanced upward at the sky.

"A starn chase is a long chase, yer honor, and I'm mortally afeard that this hyer breeze is going to be something more than a cat's-paw. It's from the east-ard, and I have allers noticed in this hyer bay, that sich a wind a-springin' up at this hyer time, generally 'mounts to something.'"

"The fellow is putting sich a sea, just as if he meant to run for blue water and he will surely never dare to do that in such a cockle-shell of a boat, for if the wind should come up to anything of a blow it would be apt to play the mischief with him, unless he's an old and experienced sailor, and from what I saw of him I should set him down for a land-lubber."

"Ay, ay, yer honor, I shouldn't wonder," said the old salt. "He's either an able-bodied seaman, or a reg'lar greenhorn, or he wouldn't run afore the wind as he is doing, for I tell you what it is, yer honor, if we don't have a big blow afore we are an hour older then my name ain't Joe Brace."

Blount took a look at the sky. The old man was right; already the clouds had commenced to gather and to a sailor's eye there was ample evidence that a storm was impending.

"It is going to blow," the young man remarked. "Well, so much the better; we'll drive him right out of the bay and when he gets into rough water, he'll be obliged to go about, then if it doesn't come up too dark, so that he can slip by us, we may be able to overhaul him."

On they went, gaining rapidly on the other craft, until hardly more than a quarter of a mile separated the two. By this time, they had got past the twin lights on the Highlands and were about abreast of the light-house on the point of Sandy Hook.

Before them lay the ocean, the water already beginning to feel the influence of the rising wind and heaving up and down in long swells.

The clouds began to gather over the face of the moon, and partially to obscure its light.

Blount's boat had come so near that the young man felt satisfied the unknown was within range of his revolver.

"Now hit her up, lads!" he said, drawing his revolver, "if we can hold our own for ten minutes more I may be able to either shoot or frighten him into submission."

"Ten minutes, yer honor, is 'bout all you've got," the old salt remarked. "For in that 'ere time he'll be around the Hook and then with this hyer wind he'll fly from us like a bird."

The crew, excited by the chase, redoubled their efforts, the boat traveled through the water at a rapid pace, Blount rose in the stern, deliberately cocked his revolver, and leveled it at the fugitive.

"Come about or I'll put a ball through you!" he cried.

"Ha! ha! ha!"

Over the waves came the demoniac laugh of the stranger.

"For the last time I demand that you surrender or your blood will be upon your own head!"

"Fire, weak, mortal fool! I defy alike fire, lead or steel!" the other replied.

Coming to the conclusion that it was useless to waste words upon a man who was either rash to desperation or else so nearly a lunatic that he did not comprehend the risk he was running, Blount opened fire. But it was difficult to aim accurately in such a sea, and two shots went wide of the mark.

Again the fiend-like laugh of the unknown rung out shrilly on the air.

"By Jove! I will hit him this time!" Blount cried, but even as he spoke, the other craft ran around the point, and getting the full benefit of the wind which suddenly strengthened just at that moment, flew over the surface of the wave like a sea-bird.

"The jig is up!" cried the old salt in disgust.

Then up rose the unknown in the stern of his boat, and extending his arms in a peculiar fashion, laughed in demon-like glee.

The boat's crew lay on their oars, and every head was turned to watch the man; many of them had sailed in southern seas, heard strange tales and seen strange sights.

"Shiver my timbers! if it ain't the vampire bat!" old Joe Brace exclaimed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF THE VAMPIRE.

"[The Vampire Bat]" exclaimed Blount, echoing the words of the bo'swain.

"Ay, ay, yer honor, sure as you're born!" answered the old sailor. "No wonder the storm is a-coming up! What do you s'pose that 'ere critter keers for anything of that kind? Why, that's jest nuts to him! The harder it blows the better he likes it. Didn't he say that he wasn't afeard of anything mortal? Heaven help the poor gal, say I, for she's probably a corner long afore now. No use chasin' the thing, for if we got up to it the odds are big that it would vanish in a clap of thunder."

And then, just as if the elements were listening to the sailor's words, a vivid flash of lightning came out of the clouds, followed by a low, rumbling peal of thunder.

More than one of the men in the boat started, for it seemed reasonable to the most of them that there might be some truth in the bo'swain's words.

The wind increased, the clouds thickened, so that for a few moments the light of the moon was ob-

scured, and when the rays again struggled forth, the boat of the fugitives had gained such headway that it was clearly impossible it could be overtaken.

Reluctantly, Blount gave orders to discontinue the chase, and, putting his boat about, headed for the ship.

The wind grew still stronger and the waves rolled high, tossing their white caps up toward the sky, which was covered with dark and angry-looking clouds.

Blount cast an anxious glance behind, the little craft had now disappeared in the distance, swallowed up by the darkness.

"Well, whatever the fellow is, he'll have a rough time of it this night in that egg-shell of a boat off this dangerous shore, or else I'm no prophet."

"Lord love yer honor," cried old Joe, "the weather ain't any more to sich a critter as that than to the Flying Dutchman w'ot used to beat about Cape Horn."

"I heered tell on a vampire bat once down in the Isle of Java," observed another old seaman. "It was nigh onto twenty years ago, and this hyer thing used for to light onto a sleeping man, w'ot was foolish enough fur to camp out in the woods, fan him with his wings so as fur to keep him from waking and suck his blood at the same time. I never see'd any of the things, tho' I've heered plenty of yarns 'bout them, but I allers reckoned it war a kind of a bird."

"Thar's whar you are out o' your reckoning, messmate!" the bo'swain exclaimed. "Tain't a bird, or anything else w'ot's right an' nat'ral, but a sort of a devil w'ot comes in the shape of a big bat; it's got the figger of a man, but the wings of a bird, a kinder hitched onto a man's arms, and the only thing it can live on is human blood. Leastways, that's how the yarn was spun to me, and I reckon that it's nigh onto thirty years ago when I sailed in them Southern seas."

"Well, all I know 'bout it is w'ot I heered, and I must say, bo'swain, I don't take much stock in the devil business, seeing as how I never yet run across any of the critters in the four quarters of this hyer globe that I've sailed in, man and boy, fur forty years," responded the other, stoutly.

"Sho! tain't much use for to argufy 'bout the matter, but I'm willing to leave it to Blount," observed the bo'swain, evidently annoyed that his yarn should be doubted. "If the vampire bat ain't a devil, then I'm a land-lubber and don't know the taste of salt water."

Blount was placed in a difficult position for he saw that the sailor believed in the vampire story as firmly as he did in his own existence, and he hated to wound the old man's feelings by stating that modern opinion had rejected the vampire story as being entirely unworthy of belief, so he dodged the question.

"Well, Joe, it is one of those things that a man must form his own opinion about," he remarked. "That there is a big bat down in the lands of the tropics, which is accused of being a blood-sucker, and attacking sleeping men, is pretty generally believed, although some learned men dispute its existence, or at least deny that it attacks men, and that creature is called the vampire bat, and then, a good many years ago, almost everybody believed that there was a sort of a creature, not exactly human, yet wearing the human shape, a human in fact who ought to be in the grave, but who managed to lead a sort of a false life, by robbing his victims of theirs. For instance, suppose there was a girl twenty years old, and whose natural term of life would be forty, that is if the vampire did not cut it short; by killing her and drinking her blood, the vampire added the twenty years of her life to his own, and so he really became like the Wandering Jew, a being who would never die, provided he could always procure victims."

"That's it, yer honor! that's the yarn, just as I heered it spun a good thirty years ago!" the bo'swain exclaimed.

"Yes, yer honor, but I reckon that people now-a-days don't take much stock in that hyer yarn. do they?" said the other seaman.

"Well, take the world at large, I suppose there isn't many who believe that such a thing exists now, or ever did exist, although in the old time, a man would have been a laughing-stock for everybody if he had presumed to doubt the truth of the story."

"You see, Joe, you'll have to back water on yer vampire yarn!" exclaimed the other old salt, triumphantly.

"Avast there, messmate, I ain't that kind of a marling-spike!" Joe replied. "W'ot does it matter w'ot folks say? Don't all the land-lubbers grin at the idea of the sea-sarpint, and whar's the able-bodied seaman w'ot ain't see the thing a dozen times?"

This was a knock-down lick, and the rest nodded their heads in approval.

"And don't they hoo, hoo! at mermaids? but we old sailors know that thar is sich things, if you'll take the trouble to go where they are. And this very night hain't we seen the vampire bat? Wasn't it a man with the wings of a bird? Kin any of you say that it wasn't? And do you s'pose any man with two grains of sense in his head would dare to run down the Jersey coast in such a night as this, in a boat like that? Why, if he don't go to Davy Jones's locker afore two hours are over it is because thar ain't anything human 'bout him or his craft."

"That's so, that's so," murmured the rest, and the other perceiving that the majority sided with the bo'swain gave up the discussion.

Of course Blount was above yielding to such superstition; he knew well enough that the abductor was a man, and the only explanation he could give in regard to his singular conduct was that he was a little cracked in the upper story, for surely no man in his senses would thus rush to almost certain death.

By the time that the boat reached the steamer a regular gale was blowing.

Blount made his report and the captain shook his head.

"It is a sad affair, Mr. Blount, a mysterious one, too, for it is certain that no such boat as the one you describe can live off the Jersey coast on such a night as this, so it is almost impossible for the girl and her abductor to escape a watery grave."

All night long the storm continued, and it did not cease until after daybreak.

The steamer came up to her berth in the city, and

as she was being slowly towed in to the wharf, Culpepper and Almayne encountered each other in the crowd which had congregated to await the disembarkation of the passengers.

"I was at your house this morning!" Culpepper exclaimed, "but they told me you had gone out. I thought it probable that you were busy about this affair and so I came down here."

"Oh, yes, I am not the man to waste precious moments or allow golden opportunities to escape me."

"Hallo, there's Batterhofer now," Culpepper remarked, catching sight of the old lawyer in the crowd. "He has come in person to receive the girl. Suppose he sees us?"

"Well, what of it? Isn't it as likely for us to have friends on board of the steamer as anybody else?" Almayne replied. "He must be gifted with uncommon acuteness to suspect that our presence here can have aught to do with him, or with the girl."

"What is the programme? I presume you are proceeding on some definitely arranged plan of operations."

"Oh, yes, I have mapped out the whole affair in my mind, and I have only come down here out of pure curiosity to see how the young lady looks."

"What is the game?"

"I have employed a couple of private detectives and put them on Batterhofer's track, so that he can't move without my knowledge. I want to ascertain where he puts the girl, find out what kind of a creature she is, and then I will be able to decide in regard to the best mode of preventing her from interfering with our plans. We can't very well make headway against an enemy until we find out all about the opposing force. Then, too, I have bribed the lawyer's confidential clerk; he's a rascal on a small salary and jumped at the chance to make a hundred; there he is now; that sleek, oily-looking fellow at Batterhofer's side; so I shall know all that he knows."

The steamer was at last made fast, and the old lawyer, accompanied by his clerk, hurried on board, only to be told the tale of the girl's mysterious disappearance.

An hour later the information, in all its details, was in Almayne's possession.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed to Culpepper, discussing the matter, "we have put ourselves to a good deal of trouble for nothing, and I am a hundred out."

"It's mighty strange though, isn't it?"

"Yes, the chapter of accidents stood our friend. She may turn up again though, and we must keep on the watch."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DETECTIVE'S RUSE.

Of all the detectives in New York none stood higher in the estimation of the superintendent of police than John Irving, and good reason had the chief for his confidence. In a dozen difficult cases Irving had proved himself the right man in the right place, and the dangerous classes too of great Gotham shared in the belief of the police superintendent that Irving was the most capable of all the city detectives, and many a bold ruffian had given leg bail and fled from New York in hot haste when he heard that the celebrated detective was on his track.

Proteus-like the police blood-hound was capable of assuming disguises so complete that his nearest and dearest friend would never suspect his identity, and being a man of such rare ability, it was but natural that the hunting down of the mysterious assassin should be intrusted to him.

The detective puzzled over the matter for some time. He was of the superintendent's opinion that the murders were committed by a single assassin, although it was possible he might have assistance; he believed too that the doer of the deed rather gloried in the act and prided himself upon being able to baffle the skill of the police; but how to strike the trail of the mysterious murderer, unless found by accident, was a puzzle; finally though the detective hit upon a plan.

The victims were all elderly men and all strangers to New York. Now Irving, although not old, yet was not young, and being portly and massive in form, had little difficulty in transforming himself into a fine specimen of the traveling Briton, side-whiskers, eye-glasses, accent and all. He even went to the trouble to go clear to Albany, and assume his disguise there, then came down the river by boat, accompanied by a well-worn sole-leather trunk, sticking to which were labels, apparently testifying that it had been half over the world.

Upon arriving in the city the detective had caused himself to be driven with considerable display to one of the leading up-town hotels, where he registered as Major Gordon McAllister, London, England.

The detective's scheme was an extremely simple one. He intended, in the guise of an elderly stranger, with plenty of money, to flaunt in all the public places of the city, thinking thereby to attract the attention of the mysterious assassin, who, thinking him an easy prey, would be lured onward to the attack, and so discover himself.

It was a bold game to play, for there was a slight possibility that the unknown murderer had his plans so well arranged that the man caught within the toils was not allowed a single chance of escaping with life from the snare.

The detective, however, was willing to run the risk of this, for he argued that there was a deal of difference between himself, armed to the teeth, fully prepared for the encounter, and the unfortunate victims who, probably, had not the slightest suspicion that danger threatened until they were in a position to receive the fatal blow and all means of escape cut off.

Irving had arranged with the superintendent to have men posted at certain points, day and night, so that he could instantly communicate with headquarters if the necessity arose, but so exceedingly careful was the detective in the carrying out of his scheme, that neither the men, his comrades, or even the superintendent himself had the slightest inkling in regard to his disguise.

A week passed away, and though the disguised detective had been approached by a half a dozen ras-

cals, all intent upon making him a victim, yet when he had followed each and every one up, which he did with the utmost patience, they all turned out to be petty, common scoundrels, not worth wasting time upon.

"By Jove!" muttered the detective, as he pursued his promenade along Broadway and up Fifth avenue one pleasant afternoon, "is it possible that the fellow has given up the business, retired rich, or in some mysterious way discovered that I am on his track?"

And just as Irving had come to the conclusion that he was wasting time and might as well give the matter up as a bad job, a lady in passing glanced at him in a peculiar way.

Now the detective, although a bachelor, was noted on the force for being quite a lady's man, and from the glance that he had received from the fair unknown he came to the conclusion that she would not be displeased to make his acquaintance.

Irving was a fine-looking man, and even though his disguise made him appear ten or fifteen years older than he really was, yet it did not destroy his personal appearance.

The lady was young and good-looking, dark-eyed and dark-haired; Irving could make this out, although she wore a light, fleecy veil that in a measure concealed her features. She was dressed in the most exquisite taste, wore rich jewelry, not gaudy, but just enough for adornment, and it was plain that she was a lady by birth, breeding and station.

"By George!" muttered the detective, using his favorite exclamation, as he turned and followed in the wake of the woman, "it would be odd if in this disguise I should succeed in fascinating some Murray Hill dame. If I should happen to pick up a rich wife now, wouldn't it be a stroke of luck? She looks a little like a foreigner, and if she is, perhaps it will not be difficult to make her acquaintance, for these ladies raised abroad are not so deuced particular, after they have reached a certain age, as our American girls."

Upon reaching Broadway the lady sauntered along, looking in the shop-windows, and every now and then casting a shy glance behind her in such a manner that the detective felt perfectly sure she was aware he was following her, and was not displeased at him for so doing.

When she reached Union Square, the detective was only a few steps behind her, and she took advantage of the fact that the sidewalk was for the moment deserted to "accidentally" drop her handkerchief.

Irving understood that this was done for his especial benefit, and he was quick to improve the opportunity.

Picking up the handkerchief he hastened forward and accosted the lady.

"I beg your pardon, miss, you have dropped your handkerchief," and he tendered it to her with his most gallant bow.

With an air of charming confusion the lady received it, and then discovered that one of the bangles attached to her bracelet was missing.

"I wouldn't have lost it for the world!" she declared, speaking with a slight foreign accent. "It must have become detached since I came out, for I am sure it was on the bracelet when I started. I came down the avenue to Broadway."

"Strange coincidence! that is exactly the way I came. If you will permit me, I will accompany you on your return, and assist you to look for the trinket."

The lady appeared confused, cast down her eyes, half blushed, and murmured something about "being sorry to trouble a stranger," but Irving gallantly protested that it wasn't the least bit of trouble, produced his card case—he had taken the precaution to provide himself with a "pasteboard," got up in stunning style—and she, evidently impressed with the idea that her companion was a man of consequence, accepted his escort without further words.

And as they walked up the street it was the most natural thing in the world for them to fall into conversation. Irving explained who he was—"gave her the English art," as he would have said in the slang of his trade, and she told her story.

As he had guessed, she was of foreign birth, French, but she had lived so long in this country that it seemed like her native land. She was called Marie de Gronville, was a widow, having lost her husband, who was in the tobacco trade, some two years before. She had had considerable trouble in settling up her husband's estate, owing to the fact that his business connections were mainly with foreign parties, but now she had come to the end of her trouble, and was prepared to enjoy life, although she was such a stranger in New York, having, during her husband's lifetime, resided principally in the South, that she had hardly an acquaintance in the city.

Irving was in the seventh heaven of delight; evidently he had stumbled upon an unexpected piece of good fortune. The detective was too shrewd a man not to closely scrutinize the lady while she was relating her story, for the thought had naturally come to him that it might possibly be a "plant!" the lady might be a confidence operator, seeking to entrap him, but by the time she had ended her recital, he was satisfied not only that the story was correct, but that after the fashion common to some women she had taken a most prodigious fancy to him at first sight.

Here was a windfall with a vengeance; a young and pretty widow, with a fortune too, apparently a pretty big one, from the carelessness with which she spoke about money, and there didn't seem to be the least obstacle in the way of his winning the lady if he chose to play his game correctly.

In charming confusion she invited him to go with her to her home, and seemed delighted when he accepted.

Her house was in one of the up-town cross streets, a handsome though small brown-stone front, with a stable in the rear.

Irving was ushered into the parlor, and with her own hands the fair widow brought cakes and wine, and challenged him to pledge her health in the ruddy vintage of the grape.

The glasses clinked and they drank, but no sooner had the detective swallowed the draught than his senses began to desert him.

The room swam around his giddy head.

Too late he knew the truth.

He was drugged and in the toils.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER VICTIM.

NINE days had passed since Irving had taken up his quest and, as no word had come from him in all that time, the superintendent began to wonder what on earth had become of him.

So perfect had been the detective's disguise that, although he had passed by the men, appointed to act in concert with him, a dozen times and they were as well acquainted with him as though they were all his own brothers, yet not a single man recognized him.

The chief became alarmed as time passed on and he neither saw nor heard from the detective. A fear took possession of his mind that some mischance had befallen him, and he caused a secret alarm to be sent out, but nothing came of it; no one had seen or heard of the detective since he departed on his mission.

It was just possible, of course, that Irving had hit upon some clew which, to follow up, had caused him to go out of town, but the superintendent was not satisfied with this theory, for he felt sure Irving would never have left town without notifying him.

Both the Governor and the mayor, having been informed that the detective had undertaken the task of discovering the secret assassin, and knowing the ability of the man, had great hopes that he would succeed in solving the bloody mystery, and they called upon the superintendent frequently, anxious for intelligence, hoping that the detective had hit off the trail, and that there was a probability of the discovery of the assassin.

On the ninth day after the blood-hound of the law had set forth upon the search, the two officials were closeted with the police chief, and they plainly expressed their disappointment when the superintendent reported that he had not the slightest bit of news to offer.

"Well, what do you think about it?" the Governor asked. "What is your opinion in regard to the matter? Isn't it strange that you haven't received any word whatever from Irving?"

"Yes, it is," the chief admitted, "and I must say I regard it as a bad sign, although the old adage says that no news is good news, but I can't make up my mind that it is so in this case; it is just possible that Irving has got on the track of the rascal, and the fellow finding it out has fled—"

"And Irving has followed in pursuit, eh?" exclaimed the mayor.

"Yes, it is possible; but not probable."

Just at that moment the chief's secretary came in with a letter which had been left by the carrier. A peculiar-looking letter, addressed to the Superintendent of the New York Police, but instead of the superscription upon the envelope being written, it was formed of printed letters, of different sizes, evidently cut from a newspaper, and pasted upon the envelope.

The chief laughed as he showed the letter to his visitors.

"This ought to be something important," he observed, "for the person that sent it is so afraid his handwriting will be recognized, that he has employed this device to prevent discovery. It is an old trick, and yet as a general rule such letters seldom amount to anything."

The superintendent opened the envelope carefully with his pen-knife, drew out the sheet of foolscap paper within, and when that was unfolded, the communication was found to be composed of the same printed characters as formed the address.

"By heavens! gentlemen, this refers to the very subject we were talking about!" the chief exclaimed, as he glanced at the message. "Listen!"

"Have you missed your detective, Irving? Do you want to know where he is? Be at the lower end of City Hall Park to-night at twelve, and a man will be there to give you a pointer. Keep it dark."

"No signature, gentlemen, as you will observe, and each word is a printed one, cut from a newspaper, evidently, and pasted on the letter; the fellow was determined that we should not have a clew as to who he was by his handwriting."

"What do you think about it—what does it mean?" the Governor asked.

"As far as I can make out it signifies that Irving, instead of trapping the scoundrels, has fallen into a snare himself. This seems to say that there is a gang at the bottom of the business. I don't generally take much stock in letters of this kind, but I believe there is something in this. The fellow that sent it knows evidently that Irving is absent on important detective business, and that I am bothered by not hearing from him. Of course there are leaks in all offices, but I think I have contrived to keep this matter pretty quiet; so it would seem as if this communication really came from some one who knows what has become of Irving and is disposed to make use of his knowledge."

"But if the writer is one of the band, why should he betray the secret?"

"Going to peach on his accomplices—turn State's evidence, you know," replied the superintendent. "These rascals are seldom true to each other if they can make a stake by turning informer. If it wasn't for these sneaks we shouldn't make much headway, sometimes."

"You are satisfied that there isn't any humbug about it?" the Governor asked, rather suspicious.

"What object would any one have in sending such a letter unless they meant business?"

"None at all," remarked the mayor, "unless some fool was doing it for a joke."

"Yes, there are plenty of such idiots in the world, but a practical joker would not be apt to have any knowledge of this business," the superintendent replied. "No, gentlemen, I think you will find that it will turn out to be about as I say. Irving got on the track of the scoundrels, just as I felt certain he would; ventured into their den, single-handed, expecting only to collar one man, for he believed with me that there wasn't but a single hand in the business; the odds were too great and they downed him, and that is the reason why I haven't heard anything from him. Now one of the gang has taken a tumble to himself and thinks he can make a stake by giving the thing away."

The others nodded; the theory seemed reasonable.

"So, gentlemen, at twelve to-night I will be at the appointed spot."

"I'll go with you, if my presence will not interfere with the business in hand!" exclaimed the mayor.

"Not at all!"

"And I will make one of the party," the Governor added.

"I shall be glad of your company, gentlemen, for I think that the author of this communication means business. I will have a squad of men near at hand, ready for action, if any immediate work is required. I am sorry for Irving; it will be a dreadful blow to him if the fellows have captured his precious person, and it takes a squad to snake him out of their hands. He'll be disgusted, for, so far in his professional career, he has been very successful and has worked up some cases that would do credit to any detective in the world, bar none."

"At twelve, then," said the Governor, as he and the mayor arose.

"Yes, but we want to start about a quarter before. Suppose I meet you at the Fifth Avenue Hotel? I will have a coach and it will give us ample time to reach the spot, if we start from the hotel at a quarter before twelve."

To this the others agreed and then departed.

The superintendent arranged to have a squad of a half a dozen of his best men in the neighborhood of the park at twelve exactly and managed the matter so that they could reach the locality without any one suspecting their presence in the vicinity.

"The bird is probably a wary customer and I must be careful not to frighten him away before he sings his little song," the police chief observed.

Not the slightest thought that there might be personal danger in the quest ever entered the brain of the superintendent. He knows the rogues of New York too well; no five or ten of them would have dared to attack the superintendent in the open street, no matter what the hour.

Promptly that night, at a quarter to twelve, the two officials were at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and equally as promptly the superintendent made his appearance in a coach.

The mayor and the Governor got in and away they went.

Right to the minute, just as the bells tolled the midnight hour, the three men alighted from the hack on the Broadway side of the park, near the City Hall.

"Remain here, gentlemen, if you please," said the police official, "while I go forward and see what the party is made of; it will not do for all of us to go, for if the rascal saw three men, he would be apt to suspect that there was a trap and refrain from putting in an appearance. When a fish of this sort is hooked he has to be played very carefully or you'll never land him."

The others saw the wisdom of this course, and so they remained by the hack while the superintendent walked to the end of the park.

City Hall Park formerly ran to a point at the lower end, but the General Post-office was built upon that particular spot and a broad street, for the convenience of the mail-teams, so that they can reach the rear doors of the building, separates the post-office from the park.

At the edge of the street the chief halted and looked around him. He reached the spot just as the bells gave the final stroke of the hour.

No one was in sight; ten, fifteen minutes the official waited, but no one came; then the figure of a man, half-reclining in an angle of the building opposite, attracted his attention.

"I wonder if that is the party and he has fallen asleep?"

The chief crossed the street and laid his hand upon the man's shoulder.

It was the detective, Irving, cold in death!

CHAPTER IX.

LAMARDALE'S SUSPICIONS.

REDMOND LAMARDALE was one of the representative men of New York. He had entered the great metropolis years ago, when the city was a small town indeed compared to what it now is; a poor boy, yet with an indomitable will, he had worked his way up until the banking-house of Lamardale was as well known and its influence as great as that of any other establishment in this same line of business in the country.

Lamardale was one of the, so-called, successful men; everything he touched seemed to turn into gold, and it was a joke in the commercial world, when any one of note became interested in a losing speculation, for the "street" to say, "Get Lamardale to take hold of it and then you will see the money come tumbling in."

In person the banker was a tall, portly man, well-preserved for his years, being over seventy, with a massive face, betraying his resolute nature in every line, fringed with iron-gray hair, and illuminated by a pair of keen, gray eyes, that showed little trace of the ravages of time.

Like most men who have fought the world successfully, and acquired a commanding position and colossal wealth, Lamardale had an imperious way and was impatient of contradiction. He had been so long accustomed to having all his schemes progress to a successful end that the miscarriage of his plans in regard to the girl annoyed him greatly, and even Batterhofer, who was used to his moods, having been his confidential adviser and attended to all his important and private business for years, was amazed at the irritation which he displayed about the matter.

When the lawyer had returned from the steamer and related the story of the disappearance of the girl, the old gentleman had flown into the most violent passion.

"It is a plot—a conspiracy to extort money from me!" he declared, jumping to his feet and pacing up and down the confines of his library with the restlessness of a caged lion.

"A conspiracy to extort money!" cried the old lawyer, utterly unable to comprehend what his client was driving at.

"Yes, yes, I understand it all! but the rascals will find that the game will not work. They have the girl—they can keep her for all that I shall do, and much good may they get out of her! But if they think to use her as a weapon against me, they never made a greater mistake in all their lives!"

"But, Mr. Lamardale, I do not understand—"

"Of course not! of course not!" the other cried.

Impatiently. "You cannot be expected to understand a matter of which you know absolutely nothing. I tell you it is a plot! I can see it at a glance; and I have been afraid of something of the kind all the time. I suspected that there might be certain parties base enough to follow the girl from England and try and use her as a weapon against me the moment she got on this side of the water. They discovered I had sent for her, and they laid their plans accordingly."

"Mr. Lamardale, I trust you will excuse me for being obliged to differ with you," the lawyer said; he was a stately, white-haired gentleman of the old school, very polite and very precise.

"Well, how do you differ?"

"Your statement that some one in England discovered that you had sent for the girl cannot possibly be correct, for you did not appear in the matter at all; in fact, so cautious was I in arranging the details of the affair, so that your agency should not be suspected, that I myself did not appear in the transaction, but the business was done in the name of one of the clerks in my office; so, Mr. Lamardale, you may rest assured, as far as the affair itself was concerned, no one in England could possibly have suspected that you had anything to do with it. In fact, I do not see how any one, either here or elsewhere, could have known anything of it, for I was careful not to speak about the matter to a soul, and as it was known only to us, I do not comprehend how it could have leaked out."

By this time Lamardale had recovered in a measure from the violent passion into which he had been thrown, and upon reflecting upon the matter he was obliged to admit the truth of the lawyer's remarks.

"Besides, the young man on board of the steamer, from whom I received the particulars of the strange affair, informed me that there wasn't any doubt in his mind that the man who carried off the girl got on board the steamer by means of a small boat when she came to anchor off quarantine."

"But the motive for the crime?" Lamardale questioned. "There must have been some powerful motive, for a man wouldn't put himself in jeopardy by so willfully defying the law without a good and sufficient reason."

"That is very true, and that is what occurred to me the moment I heard the particulars and questioned the young man in regard to it. He was a sensible, intelligent fellow and came to the point at once with all a sailor's frankness. He thought the man was crazy."

"Crazy!" the banker exclaimed.

"Yes; he had a talk with the fellow on the deck, just before the abduction occurred; he noticed something peculiar about the man and got the idea that he was not a passenger, and naturally was puzzled to account for his presence on the ship. He asked his name, then went to examine the passenger-lists and when he returned the man had rendered the girl insensible in some way and in a small boat was making off. Chase was at once given, but a storm came up and the abductor with his victim escaped by running right out to sea."

"It is the strangest affair that I ever knew of in all my experience," the banker remarked, reflectively. "Of course, my dear Batterhofer, I have more than a stranger's interest in this girl, and there are weighty reasons for that interest; one of these days you shall know all, but for the present, I will retain the secret. I have sedulously kept myself in the background in the matter, for fear there might be parties in England, who, if they learned I was interesting myself in the girl, would strive to use her as a tool to wring money from me, knowing I was a man of means. Mind! I am not sure that any such parties exist, I only took precautions in case they did; but as to any one on this side of the water troubling their heads about the girl, it looks altogether impossible; for while it was probable that there might be persons in England who knew something about her and her family, it is certain there wasn't any one in America besides myself who did. My unfortunate brother, who fell by the hand of this secret assassin, had some slight knowledge, but that I imparted to him, and now that he is dead, I alone know aught of her."

"It is certainly a mysterious affair, and the supposition of the young man, Mr. Blount, who is Third Officer of the City of Chester, that the deed was perpetrated by a lunatic seems to be the only reasonable explanation."

"By the by, how would it do for me to see this gentleman?" asked Lamardale, abruptly. "Possibly he might be able to suggest something. I do not feel disposed to leave the matter in this unsatisfactory state. After bringing the girl clear from England, I object to having her taken out of my hands in this unceremonious manner."

"It would be an excellent idea!"

"Suppose you see him and bring him up as soon as convenient."

"Very well, my time is my own to-day. I've nothing important on hand, and I'll hunt him up."

The lawyer departed, but he acted so promptly in the matter, and was so favored by circumstances, that within two hours he returned accompanied by Mr. Blount.

The young man was introduced to the banker by the lawyer, and at the first glance Lamardale, who prided himself upon his judgment in reading character, took a fancy to the gentleman, and so, without hesitation, he confided to him the deep interest which he took in the abducted girl.

"Mr. Batterhofer informs me," he said in conclusion, "that it is your belief that the man who committed this most atrocious crime was not exactly right in his head."

"Yes, sir, that was the opinion I formed, although from the conversation I had with him on the steamer's deck, just before the act was committed, I should not have suspected that there was anything the matter with him, but when I chased him in the boat, while the storm was rising and I threatened him with my revolver, then he most certainly acted like a man who was a little cracked in the upper story."

"Could you imagine any motive that the man could possibly have for the outrageous act?"

"None at all; I am satisfied that he was a stranger to the girl, and gained access to the deck of the steamer by means of the same small boat in which he escaped, and there not being the slightest reason

for the deed, as far as I can see, is why I am impressed with the belief that it was due to the witless freak of a lunatic."

"It looks like it! Upon my soul it does!" Lamardale exclaimed.

The old lawyer agreed with this.

"But now the point is—what has become of the girl?" the banker asked.

Blount shook his head.

"I am afraid, sir, that the ruffian, whether sane or a lunatic, hurried both himself and the girl to certain death. He was in a small boat, the storm was high, and the coast dangerous."

"But there is a chance that they might have escaped?"

"Yes, sir, a chance."

"Are you at liberty to accept a commission to look into the matter?—never mind the expense, I will stand that, no matter what it costs."

Blount accepted the offer gladly, for he was deeply interested, and half-an-hour later he was on his way to the Jersey coast.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE GALE.

AND what was the fate of the boat which, like a phantom craft, fled, tossing on the raging billows, into the darkness of the night?

The sea was raging mountains high, and the wind kept steadily increasing in strength. The boat, running straight before the gale, raced onward at almost incredible speed.

The craft was almost half a mile from the land, and every now and then, when the lightning's flash illuminated the darkness of the night, the low outline of the Jersey coast could be distinctly observed.

"Now, then, follow me if you dare!" the unknown had shouted in wild glee, as he ran past the low sandy point of the Hook into the open sea, and with a turn of the wrist, pointed the prow of the boat to the southward, thus getting the full benefit of the wind.

As he had anticipated, the other boat gave up the chase, and as he cast a glance backward and beheld them pull around, he laughed in wild, fierce glee.

"Aha, you cowards! you don't dare to follow me!" he cried, "and you are wise not to attempt it, for I would lead you to certain death! Oh, isn't this glorious? This is life—this is worth living for! How the balmy breeze fans my fevered cheek and cools my heated brain!" And then again the man laughed in wild delight, and if Blount could have heard him he would have been certain that his guess was right when he came to the conclusion that the man was a lunatic.

When the stranger again looked behind him the pursuing boat had disappeared.

"The blind fools to imagine that they could overtake me, and all the advantages on my side!" he exclaimed, scornfully.

"But have they given up the chase?" he cried, abruptly, after quite a long silence. He was keeping the boat right straight before the wind and racing along at a speed of fully ten knots an hour. "No, no, it is not likely," he muttered, after cogitating over the matter for awhile. "That young puppy has taken a fancy to the girl. I saw that in his face, and that is the reason why he pursued me so hotly. He is a sailor and knows that he might as well chase a will-o'-the-wisp as follow me over the open sea, but he is of the bull-dog breed and will not give up the pursuit while a chance remains. He cannot follow me in the teeth of this gale, but he can wait in the calmer water inside of Sandy Hook to intercept me when I return. Yes, yes! that will be his plan undoubtedly; but what chance is there for its success on such a night as this, with the storm raging, the sky black with angry clouds, and all so dark that, excepting when the lightning flashes its vivid light, not an object can be distinguished a hundred feet distant? A single boat could hardly succeed in patrolling the entrance on a clear night, let alone in the face of such a storm as this. My game is simple enough; I will go about and make for the Long Island shore and slip up into the bay under the lee of the land."

It was a noticeable fact that now the man was communing with himself, there was not a particle of foreign accent perceptible in his voice, which plainly showed that the accent was not natural but assumed.

The girl, the victim of this outrage, had been placed in the bow of the boat, and the man had not paid the least attention to her, until now, when a movement on her part showed him that the influence of the drug, which had stupefied her, was passing away.

Slowly the use of her senses came back, and at last she sat up and stared around. She was still so confused that she did not realize what had occurred; she was like one wandering in the mazes of a horrid dream.

But as she looked upon the waste of waters, shut in by the inky darkness of the night, and then caught sight of the striking features of the stranger, crouching in the stern, all at once she realized what had taken place, but when she did she was even more bewildered, if such a thing could be, than before.

She understood that she was the victim of a foul outrage—she had been abducted from the deck of the steamer by this man, whose evil eyes seemed to glare at her with demoniac power, but why had this been done? what motive was there for so foul a deed? She had not been injured—had escaped bodily harm, excepting that she felt weak and faint from the effects of the drug which she had been forced to inhale. The few trinkets she wore had not cost a pound note, and surely no one would be silly enough to imagine she had any money concealed about her person; what then could any one gain by perpetrating so great a crime?

"You have recovered your senses, I perceive," the man observed.

"What does this mean?" she exclaimed.

"I do not understand," and he assumed an ignorant air.

"You know well enough! Why have you committed this gross outrage? What did I ever do to you that you should assault me in so cruel a manner?"

"Oh, you are still in a delirium, I see," he observed. "My dear girl, you must try and call back

your wandering senses. No one has harmed you. You have been carried off for a little pleasure excursion, that is all."

"You will pay dearly for this when the law seizes you in its iron grip!" exclaimed the exasperated girl.

"When the law seizes me!" and then the man laughed in such a fiendish way that it fairly made the blood of the hapless maiden run cold. "And how soon do you suppose that interesting event will take place?"

"The moment I have reached the shore, for then I will instantly denounce you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" and again the abductor laughed loud and long. "Do you really suppose that you are ever going to reach the shore?" and the man infused into the question such a terrible meaning that Lesbia, despite her undoubted courage, could not help shuddering.

"Just consider the situation!" he continued. "Here you are, in a frail boat, the wind blowing a gale, increasing in force as the night wears on, off one of the most dangerous shores in the country. Were it not for the howling of the wind we could hear the roar of the surf on the sand, the merciless breakers, that seldom part with a victim that they get within their clutches while life remains, and then the mangled, mutilated corpse is tossed, as if in contempt, high upon the beach."

"I am not afraid of the waves—I am not afraid of the wind; the hand of an all-powerful Ruler is in both!" she cried.

"But you do fear me!" he answered, abruptly.

"Yes, it is true; for I believe you are a creature of the lost soul who reigns in the realms of darkness." And so she did; if it had been possible for a girl as well educated and intelligent as Lesbia to believe in the old time traditions that, for certain purposes, fiends were sometimes permitted to assume the mortal shape, then she would most surely have been convinced that the helmsman who faced her with such a sinister expression upon his expressive features was no man of flesh and blood. But as it was she knew enough of the world to understand that there are some mortals who seem born under an evil star, being as malignant in their natures as the followers of the fallen angel.

"And you are right to fear, for never in all your life were you menaced by a more terrible danger than that which threatens you. Why do you suppose I have taken the trouble to carry you off?"

"I cannot understand—it is a mystery to me."

"Did you ever see me before?"

"Never!"

"You are sure then that I am not an old foe with an ancient grudge against you?"

"Yes, because I have no foes," she replied, in a simple, earnest way. "I have never wronged any one, and I am sure there isn't any reason why you, or any one else, should wish to injure me."

"Did the idea ever enter your head that there might be a man in this world possessed of so animal a nature that blood was congenial to him? a man of such unnatural instincts that he killed merely for the pleasure of killing?"

The breath of the girl came quick and fast as she listened to those horrid words, and having her eyes fixed intently upon the man's face, her wits rendered unnaturally sharp by the peculiar position in which she was placed, she fancied she could detect a gleam in his eyes which denoted that his wits were disordered; and immediately she remembered that she had often read that when one was dealing with insane persons it is always best to humor them in their delusions, and so, resolving to act upon this idea, she took heart a little.

That her abductor was not in his right senses was a reasonable explanation for his outrageous conduct, for, otherwise, there was not the slightest excuse for what had taken place.

"Oh, yes; such a thing might be possible," she replied, with a great effort forcing herself to appear calm.

"You believe that?"

"Yes; I presume it is not improbable."

"How about the vampire?" he asked, abruptly.

"The vampire!" she echoed, not understanding him.

"Yes, the vampire: do you believe in vampires?"

"I don't know," the girl replied, bewildered.

"You know the story of the vampire!" he continued, rapidly, his eyes swelling with unnatural fires. "The human who leads an artificial life—who lives on the blood that he extracts from his victims—that he sucks from their very veins, drawing the red life-current directly from the heart!"

"Oh, merciful heavens!" moaned the girl, almost paralyzed with terror.

"It is not a fable! such things do exist as you will find to your cost before this night is over; the old life-current ebbs feebly in the veins and a new supply is needed—fresh, young blood. You should live thirty—forty years yet, but you will die to-night and the years of your life will go to enrich another! Now we will return."

He essayed to put the boat about, but managed it so badly that it fell into the trough of a wave. The mast snapped, the boat upset and out into the raging sea went both captor and captive.

CHAPTER XI.

A BAFLED SEARCH.

HORROR-STRIKEN the police-superintendent started back and gazed for a moment in speechless amazement upon the fearful sight.

It was the detective, Irving, beyond a doubt, and from the extremely natural manner in which the body had been propped up in the doorway not one person out of a hundred would have suspected that the form was aught but that of a sleeping man.

"Dead, as I am a living sinner!" the police chief ejaculated, so overwhelmed by the unexpected discovery that he was for a few moments unable to do anything but stand and stare at the frightful sight.

"Oh, this is terrible!" he muttered. The superintendent in the course of his busy professional life had looked upon many dead bodies, but never upon one that had inspired him so with horror.

At last, with a great effort rousing himself from the shock, he hurried to where he had left the two officials, and they, perceiving by the expression upon his face that something out of the common had occurred, plied him with questions.

"Well, well, you have struck something, I see!" the Governor exclaimed.

"Is Irving safe—the rascals haven't hurt him, I hope?" the mayor added.

"He is yonder, gentlemen, and you must prepare yourselves for an unpleasant sight," responded the chief, in a sad voice, as he turned upon his heel to retrace his steps.

The others, although devoured by eager curiosity, refrained from further questions, for they guessed from the chief's words, simple though they were, that some terrible calamity had befallen the detective officer.

When the three came within the shadows of the post-office building the superintendent directed their attention to the body.

"Is he asleep?" asked the Governor.

"Not under the influence of liquor, I hope?" quoth the mayor.

"He will never sleep or drink more, gentlemen, he is dead!" answered the police official.

The others recoiled, and exclamations of horror came from their lips.

"He succeeded in his mission, as I felt sure he would; he found the assassin, but it was only to perish by his hand," said the chief, slowly and sadly.

"Oh, this is terrible!" cried the Governor, really unnerved by the fearful discovery.

"Perfectly frightful! Superintendent, this blood-thirsty villain must be hunted down and brought to justice, no matter what it costs!" the mayor exclaimed. "The whole power of the Department must be brought to bear upon this case. Why, by this atrocious crime the villain actually shows that he laughs at the exertions of the police; the killing of this unfortunate man is nothing more than a bold defiance."

"Your honor, that is a conclusion that cannot be escaped; but before we proceed further in the matter, or counsel in regard to new measures, it will be as well to have a careful examination made of the body, for by so doing we may be able to gain some points."

The others admitted the wisdom of this course, so the police were summoned and the body removed. Irving had indeed fallen by the hand of the mysterious assassin, for an examination revealed that he had perished from a stab wound piercing the heart, and on the neck, under the left ear, were the two mysterious marks which had also appeared on the bodies of the other victims.

The detective was dressed in his conspicuous Scotch tweed suit, in one of the vest pockets of which was a single card bearing the name which the detective had assumed. His wig and whiskers had been removed though, and the card was the only article that was found upon his person. But it was quite enough to give the chief a clew to the part which the detective had been playing, particularly as the superintendent's attention one day at the Fifth Avenue Hotel had been attracted by the supposed stranger, and he had inquired who he was, never suspecting that the imposing-looking foreigner was his own favorite detective in disguise.

After the examination the three held a long, private consultation. The Governor favored giving the matter the widest possible publicity—by offering a large reward for the apprehension of the assassin, thinking thereby to stimulate some private party to attempt the capture of the mysterious murderer, but the superintendent, after the fashion of the majority of men in his position, did not at all believe in the scheme.

"Better to keep it dark," he argued; "if we allow the newspapers to learn all the details of the affair it will be blazoned forth to the world, and the perpetrator of the deed will be able to find out exactly how much we know, and so can take measures against discovery. Of course we can't keep Irving's death a secret, but we can let it go to the public that he was assaulted and killed by some unknown parties, that the police have a clew and are on the track of the murderer, but not breathe a word that we know that the secret assassin, who has so far baffled all the efforts of the police, was also his slayer."

The major was rather inclined to side with the Governor in his belief that all the details had better be given to the public, but finally both came to the conclusion that the adage which says "Each man to his trade," was a wise one, and as there wasn't any doubt that the superintendent had much greater experience in rascal-catching than they, it was probable the course he advocated was the wisest one to follow.

"We will leave the matter in your hands, then," the Governor said, in conclusion, "but, Mr. Superintendent, this mysterious murderer *must* be discovered; no man, or party of men can be allowed to set the law at defiance in this audacious way."

"I will stake all the reputation that I have in police matters to hunt the villain down in time!" the chief exclaimed, "but, Governor, you must remember that I am only a man, and cannot be expected to perform impossible feats. It is a regular game that this fellow is playing, and, as it is evident he is exceedingly skillful, until he makes a false move it will be impossible for us to trip him; but the moment he does that—and he is sure to do it in the long run, for the pitcher that goes often to the well will be broken at last—then we will have him on the hip and he'll find himself in the Tombs before he knows what has happened."

This was the old "cheap" talk that police officials have indulged in ever since there has been thieves and thief-takers, but it satisfied the listeners and they departed, full of confidence that in time the mysterious assassin, who had struck so many and such terrible blows, would be in the stern grasp of the law which he had so fearfully outraged.

To do the superintendent justice, he did set to work with uncommon vigor. He thought, and rightly, that the killing of the detective was a direct "slap" in the face for him, as he expressed it; his pride was wounded, and he determined to prove to the secret slayer that he had aroused no mean antagonist when he dared to defy the superintendent of the New York police into the lists.

Barely two hours' sleep did the chief have that night, for his brain was so busily engaged in revolving plans to entrap the unknown murderer that slumber wooed it in vain. It was not until he had totally worn himself out, alternately scheming and uttering imprecations upon the head of the unknown, that he fell asleep.

In the morning his first move was to send out a general alarm in regard to the "Englishman," Gordon McAlister.

He had guessed the trick that Irving had set out to work. As the Englishman he had hoped to induce the secret murderer to attack him. He had succeeded in his design, but instead of capturing the villain, had fallen a victim to his wiles. It was the old story of catching a Tartar, the trapper entrapped.

By the alarm one slight bit of information the chief gained.

The roundsman who "covered" that part of Broadway, near Union Square, reported that three or four days before—he was uncertain as to the exact day—he had noticed a man, who resembled the description given of the Englishman, on the opposite side of the street—he was on the park sidewalk at the time—stoop and pick up a handkerchief which a lady had dropped, then the two entered into conversation, and finally went up the street together. The roundsman paid no particular attention to the little episode, for, as he expressed it, he thought it a clear case of "mashing," and wondered what it would cost the swell before he got out of the scrape.

"The woman!—what was she like?" questioned the police chief, in almost breathless eagerness.

The roundsman was at fault; he admitted that he hadn't particularly noticed her. She was "kinder stylish," dressed in dark clothes, he "thought," but he wasn't sure.

"Would you be able to identify her if you met her again?" This was a critical question, and the roundsman, after meditating about the matter for a few minutes, trying to freshen up his memory, was finally obliged to admit that he was pretty sure he would not be able so to do.

Here was a clew and yet not a clew. A woman had been with the disguised detective. He had gone with her, and that was the only trace of Irving that could be discovered, with the exception of the information furnished by the clerks of the hotel in regard to his procuring accommodations there.

Was the woman the secret assassin, or was she but a decoy used by the murderer to lure his victims into his net?

It did not seem possible that the murder could be the work of a woman's hand.

While the chief was pondering over this problem a visitor entered. The superintendent uttered a joyous cry; it was Joe Phenix, the king of detectives.

CHAPTER XII.

PHENIX ENLISTS.

"By heavens! Phenix, you are the very man I wanted!" the superintendent exclaimed, rising and shaking hands with his visitor in the most cordial manner.

To those readers who have never made the acquaintance of Joe Phenix by reading the story of his strange career, as detailed in the tales entitled "Joe Phenix, the Police Spy," "Joe Phenix, the Private Detective," and "The Wolves of New York," a few words of explanation are due.

Phenix was one of the most remarkable men whose name was ever recorded in the police annals of New York. A man possessed of wonderful physical power, undaunted courage, and a face so mobile that it was capable of the most astonishing changes, coupled with the instinct of a bloodhound, a more terrible man-catcher never got upon a rascal's track.

At first, Phenix had been in the pay of the police, then had set up a private detective bureau of his own, but for some two years now he had not been seen in New York; why he had disappeared, or where he had gone, no one knew.

And from this fact the chief, while looking for some man to put upon the track of the mysterious murderer, never thought of Phenix, but the moment that gentleman made his appearance the idea instantly occurred to him, that of all the human sleuth hounds in existence, Phenix was the best who could be chosen to get to the heart of the strange and bloody mystery.

"Yes, yes; you are the very man I want," the chief repeated. "I've a job for you, if you are open to accept a commission; but I say, what have you been doing all this time? Where have you kept yourself?"

"I have been on a journey around the world."

"Ah! around the world for sport, eh?"

"No, on business. A confidential clerk absconded from New York, carrying off a large sum of money and some private papers which involved the honor of an old and wealthy family. I was commissioned to hunt the man down, recover the money, if possible, although that was a secondary consideration, but at all hazards, and without regard to expense, to secure the papers."

"And the fellow led you a lively chase?"

"Yes; for nearly two years, but I finally ran him to earth in Brazil."

"No extradition treaty—that was ugly," observed the chief.

"There are more ways than one to kill a cat," Phenix answered, in that calm and grave way, full of quiet dignity which was natural to him. "I had anticipated that it was possible, with the start he had, he might succeed in reaching some country under whose laws he was safe, and provided against just such a contingency. I bought the documents from the owners before I left New York and when I ran the fox to earth in Brazil I claimed the papers as my property."

"By Jove! that was a sharp device."

"The laws of course upheld my claim; with the proper officer I went to seize my man; he was desperate, being thus brought to bay, and showed fight. I had cautioned the officer to be on his guard, for I thought that there might be trouble. He was an arrogant boaster, despised my warning, and was killed at the first fire. The bullet was intended for me, but I dodged, and the officer got it. Then I grappled with my man, and although he fought like a tiger, succeeded in capturing him. I got my documents, and the criminal was convicted of murder, and duly executed."

"Phenix, you are a devil of a fellow!" the chief exclaimed. "If I were a rascal I should hate to have you strike my trail."

"Well, I should do my best to make it lively and interesting for you," Phenix placidly replied. "But now, superintendent, I want a little of your assistance. I landed from the English steamer this morning, and on my way up-town in a horse car some rascal stole my watch."

The chief laid back and laughed. "Well, well!" he exclaimed, "if this isn't the richest joke of the season! The idea that a pick-pocket should select you for a subject to operate upon."

"And the worst of it is, that he succeeded in the operation; a handsome gold watch that I picked up in London at a bargain; cost me twenty-five pounds; and I haven't the remotest idea how the trick was done, excepting that as I stood on the rear platform waiting to get off, some fellows brushed past me rather rudely."

"Exactly, and that was just the time the trick was done. Two fellows stumbled up against you, you naturally elbowed them off, and a third fellow standing by your side snapped the watch off the ring."

"I guess you are about right, superintendent, I was in a sort of a brown study at the time, or maybe I would have detected the trick."

"Give me a description, and I will do what I can for you by notifying the detectives and the pawn-brokers; but really there isn't one chance out of a hundred for you to recover the property."

The description was given, noted down, and sent out by the superintendent; and then the official proceeded to explain to Phenix about the matter in which he wished to enlist his services.

The man-hunter listened attentively, and expressed his regrets when he learned of the death of detective Irving.

"As good a man as I ever worked with," he observed.

"Yes, and you will perceive how difficult the task, when such a man as Irving not only failed to apprehend the murderer, but lost his life in the bargain."

"He must be avenged," Phenix remarked, coldly and calmly, yet with a world of meaning in his tones.

"And you will undertake the job?"

"Right gladly."

Then the superintendent explained how deeply interested the mayor and Governor had become in the matter.

"They will probably stand a big reward—as much as a thousand or two, maybe more, and then Redmond Lamardale will come down handsomely. Altogether, I shouldn't be surprised if you could pick up close to five thousand dollars if you succeed in trapping the murderer."

"The money is welcome enough, of course, although I am tolerably well provided, but I would undertake the work all the same if there wasn't a dollar up, for this mysterious assassin is no common stabber, and it is these superhuman villains that I delight to track. I believe I ought to have been born a bloodhound, for I take a fierce delight when I can get upon the track of such a magnificent rascal. There is no pleasure in hunting down your common, vulgar scoundrel; that is, not for a man like myself. If I cannot chase big game, I prefer to remain idle."

"Well, judging from what has already occurred, this party will give you all the fun you want. But now, what do you think about the matter? You understand that as far as we can ascertain it was a woman who decoyed Irving to his death."

"Yes, but she is not the principal in the matter."

"You think not?"

"Oh, I feel sure of it; the woman never lived with nerve enough to commit these deeds."

"Women have done some pretty nervy things since the world began," the superintendent observed.

"Yes, but nothing of this sort."

"You forget the story of La Tour de Nesle."

"That was in a dark and barbarous age, despite the thin veneering of chivalry that covers it; besides there is no absolute proof that the tale is not a fiction. We cannot accept as literal truth all the stories that come down to us from days of yore. I have no doubt that the woman is an instrument, but not the master-mind. Chief, this fellow is one criminal picked out of ten thousand. He is a foreigner too. I think; his fantastic appearance, and the peculiar manner in which the death-wounds were inflicted, all go to prove that."

"Aha! do you think then that that blunderhead of a policeman did really see the man?"

"I have not the least doubt about it. He came up so quickly that the assassin was nearly surprised with the victim, and just had time to secrete himself behind the freight pile. Then, when he saw that the policeman was not disposed to make much of a time, he came out and sauntered away."

"Yes, the fool supposed it was a case of natural death, but I say, how the deuce did the fellow manage to get the bodies to the public places where they were found without exciting attention, because it is clear to my mind that the men were not killed upon those spots?"

Phenix shook his head.

"The conundrum is too much for you?"

"Yes, for the solving of that riddle would at once give a clue to the murderer, and that point is the one which requires to be carefully worked up."

The chief wanted to introduce Phenix to the mayor and Governor, but the detective begged to be excused, for he said he preferred to work in the dark.

"Do what you can for me in the way of the reward in case I trap the fellow," he observed in parting, "for money always comes in handy, and you know I work on the motto of 'no cure no pay.'"

Again they shook hands, and then Phenix set out to prepare for his man-hunt.

The sleuth-hound possessed one great advantage; he had been absent so long from the city that all the new brood of rascals knew him not, and as he felt pretty certain that the mysterious assassin was no old offender, it was clear he would not be acquainted with his personal appearance.

Phenix took up the lead that Irving had followed, reasoning that if Irving had succeeded in attracting the attention of the assassin he might do likewise, but he intended the acquaintanceship, should have a different ending.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE SEA.

It was a terrible sea even for a strong man and an experienced swimmer to breast, for when the boat was overturned the storm was at its height and the waves were leaping about like angry demons.

The stranger, who had been hurled head-foremost into the water, soon rose to the surface, and despite the fact that he was sadly incumbered by the heavy cloak which he wore, struck out with lusty strokes for the overturned boat. A vivid flash of lightning just at this moment lit up the vast expanse of water, and the girl, who had risen to the surface just about the same time, caught sight of her persecutor, and, as she did not lose her presence of mind in this dread extremity, Lesbia understood that he was trying to reach the boat, but as she was totally ignorant of the swimmer's art she could not hope to follow his example.

In her desperation she struck out wildly with her hands to keep from sinking beneath the surface of the wave. She was in the rear of the swimmer so that he did not perceive her.

Her clothing helped to buoy her up, but she was afraid that she would not be able to depend upon this aid for any length of time, and naught but a grave beneath the rolling billows seemed in store for her.

The lightning had died away and utter darkness reigned.

Alone, helpless upon the bosom of the raging waters, could a poor mortal be placed in a more terrible plight?

In her great despair she called aloud, her voice mingling with the roar of the angry billows and the howling of the tempest.

"Oh, merciful God! Our Father, who art in heaven, save your poor handmaiden in this, her hour of peril!"

And the Great Creator, the only friend of the orphan and the helpless, deigned to listen to the heartfelt prayer and sent assistance.

Her hands encountered a solid substance, floating upon the surface of the waves. With the energy born of despair she grasped it.

It was the broken mast with the sail still attached, but the action of the billows had rolled it around the spar so that it formed an efficient support.

"Oh, Heaven, I thank thee for this timely aid!" the girl murmured in gratitude, as she wound her arms around the floating buoy.

And now, as if satisfied with the mischief which had been wrought, there was a lull in the tempest; no more did the lightning's flash illuminate the scene; the darkness was intense, so that Lesbia was unable to ascertain whether her persecutor had been able to reach the overturned boat, which had been floating keel upward, or had succumbed to the fury of the waves.

In either case, though, it mattered not to her, for she was safe from his attacks.

There was some of the cordage still attached to the spar, floating loosely from it; this, with really wonderful forethought, she wound around her person, so that if her physical strength failed she might still be supported by that novel life-preserver.

Although not much acquainted with the sea, having always resided in an inland town, yet, from what she had read, she thought in time the spar would be carried by the action of the waves to the beach, and then, if the surf was not so terrible as to beat the life out of her when she was flung upon the strand, she would be able to escape without serious injury.

The girl's surmise was right; the spar was carried by the rolling billows in toward the shore, and, as the darkness began to lighten up a little, she could distinguish the white line of the surf where it spent its fury upon the sandy beach.

Lesbia was both strong of heart and stout in limb, and had been careful to husband all her strength, for she understood that the supreme effort must be made when the surf flung her upon the land. She must be prepared to escape the undertow, which would inevitably drag her back into the raging billows if she was not careful.

So, as she gradually drew near the land, she released herself from the ropes which she had wound around her body, prepared to abandon the spar when the necessity became urgent for her so to do.

Nearer and nearer she came; she fancied once or twice that her feet touched bottom, so shallow had become the water, and the white line of the raging surf, pouring in upon the beach with a roar like the report of a mammoth battery of artillery, could plainly be distinguished, notwithstanding the darkness that veiled the face of nature.

And now again and again her feet touched bottom as she surged in toward the beach and then was borne out again by the force of the restless waters, but although she tried with all her strength, it was impossible for her to retain her footing, so powerful being the swell of the billows.

At last, by an unusually powerful wave she was carried on its foamy crest high up on the beach.

She felt that the critical time had come. She relinquished her hold upon the spar, which had served her so well, suffering it to be carried away by the retreating wave, dug her nails into the sand and held on for dear life.

The wave upon whose crest she had floated was an unusually high one, and so its undertow was not as strong as otherwise it would have been.

The retreating water made a determined effort to force the girl from her hold, as though reluctant to give up its prey, but was not powerful enough to accomplish its purpose.

The instant the water relaxed its grasp upon her, and went roaring as if in sullen rage back to the stormy main, the girl, summoning all her strength, rose to her feet; but she was so weak from the effects of the hardship which she had undergone, that she could not walk, and the moment she attempted to move forward her limbs gave way beneath her and she sunk forward upon her face again.

And then came another mighty wave thundering upon the beach, one even more powerful than that which had carried the girl to land.

Again Lesbia dug her nails into the sand, and struggled against the power of the water; again she succeeded in resisting its force, and then, when the breaker retreated, warned by experience, she did not attempt to rise, but crawled on hands and knees away from the line of the surf.

It was a slow and painful progress, for the girl was weak from exhaustion, her brain in a whirl, and she had all she could do to keep from relapsing into insensibility.

Desperately she struggled against the faintness which was creeping over her, but resolute as was her determined will, she was not able to conquer nature; the strain upon her strength had been too much, and before she had crept a dozen feet higher up on the beach she succumbed to fatigue and fainted dead away.

Although some distance from the spot where she had first landed, she was not yet out of danger. She had been cast upon the beach by the last wave of the ebb tide; now it had turned to flood, and was encroaching steadily upon the beach, gaining inch by inch.

The girl lay in her stupor, perfectly helpless, and the restless water, like a malignant demon, gradually and surely approaching her.

The beach was quite a level one at the point upon which the girl was cast, and although she had crawled some distance from where she had first landed, she had barely gained a foot in height.

Along this part of the coast the tide rises about six feet, making, consequently, about a foot an hour, and so, within a very short time the angry breakers were again thundering close to the feet of the girl.

Twenty minutes more and most surely she would have been wrapped in the embraces of the stormy waves, and in her helpless condition such a thing would have been the prelude to certain death.

But it was not fated to be.

Through the darkness, along the beach, came a glimmering light—the light proceeded from a lantern borne by one dark form, while another followed in the rear, plodding over the sand, with their eyes fixed eagerly upon the edge of the breakers.

It was a man and woman, roughly dressed, and with coarse, ugly, repulsive features.

In one hand the man carried the lantern and in the other a boat-hook; the woman also was equipped with a similar tool.

Night prowlers were these two; relics of the old pirates of Barnegat, the wreckers who, if report speaks true, in the old days had scant mercy upon the unfortunate souls possessed of worldly goods, unlucky enough to be cast upon their dangerous coast.

"Hello, hello!" cried the man, as his eyes fell upon the form of the girl, "here is something, Betty, that may pay us for our trouble!"

"Ay, ay," responded the woman, hurrying forward, and peering in eager curiosity upon the girl.

"Pears like as if thar had bin a wrack somewhar's 'long the coast, but I hain't seen any stuff come ashore."

"Is she dead?" queried the old woman.

The man knelt down and placed his hand upon the wrist of the helpless girl.

"No, she bean't; she's alive, but I reckon she's had a mighty close shave of it. Anyhow, if we hadn't happened to come along, them breakers would 'a' had a hold on her, mighty soon and then she would have been a goner, for sure!"

"She's a lady! Jest see what little, white hands, and she's gotten a rare face, too."

"She ain't got much jewelry as far as I kin see," the man observed, examining the girl with wolfish eyes.

"Oh, she'll be worth a heap of jewelry to us!" the woman chuckled. "Lay hold on her, old man, and let's drag her up out of the reach of the water. This will be a rare haul for us, I'll go bail!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SEARCH.

THE surmise of the mysterious stranger, the abductor of the girl, in regard to the young sailor having a great deal of the bull-dog about him was correct, as he undoubtedly would have admitted if he could have followed in Blount's footsteps and watched his movements when he set out to discover what had become of the girl.

The sailor had thought the matter over carefully. From the little he had seen of the unknown he had come to the conclusion that he was not much of a mariner, and he felt tolerably certain that no one but an old and experienced sailor would succeed in safely running down along the Jersey coast in such a boat and in such a gale. The chances were good, he thought, that the boat would not be able to live in such a sea, nor to make a landing without capsizing; in either event it was possible that the occupants of the craft might be able to reach the shore, particularly if the attempt was made near one of the life-saving stations and they were aided by the coast patrol. But the night had been so dark that it would hardly have been possible for the patrolmen to distinguish the boat until she was right on the beach, and only from some one of the patrol happening to be near the spot when the boat came ashore, could assistance be had.

There was a bare possibility that the two might have escaped the perils of the night, but the chances that they had perished were much greater. This was the riddle he must solve.

Blount set about his task in a workmanlike manner.

From a friend of sporting proclivities, who was particularly interested in horse-flesh, he procured an excellent saddle nag, and with the horse he took his way by boat to the Jersey coast.

The sailor was well acquainted with the lay of the land, as at various times he had visited the region during the summer season.

From the manner in which the boat sped away before the wind, after getting around the point of Sandy Hook, Blount calculated that there would not be any particular danger of a capsize until the skipper undertook to put the boat about in order to return; then, unless he handled the craft carefully and in a sailor-like manner, the maneuver would result in an upset.

Blount's plan was to mount his horse and ride down along the beach, inquiring of every one he met if they knew anything of a small boat containing a man and woman which had come ashore during the night.

The young sailor had set about his task so promptly that he had managed to get upon the ground on the afternoon of the very day that the City of Chester had made her berth.

Diligently inquired the young man, but not a nar-

ticle of information did he gain until he came to the collection of fishermen's huts known as "Galilee," just above Long Branch.

A fishing-boat, with four sturdy sons of the brine, had just come to land and were occupied in putting their finny spoil into baskets when Blount rode up.

"I am in search of a boat that was blown around Sandy Hook last night during the gale, with a man and woman in it," he said. "Have you heard anything of a boat coming ashore anywhere along here?"

"A small keel-boat with a sail rigged into her?" asked the oldest of the fishermen, a white-headed, gray-bearded veteran.

"Yes, painted green without and white within."

"Like that 'ere boat up yonder?" and the fisherman pointed to a space between two of the houses where a small craft had been hauled up out of the water.

It was the identical boat, Blount was sure, but the sail and nearly all of the mast were gone, only a few inches of the latter remaining, the jagged end giving plain proof that it had been snapped by some violent gust of wind.

"Yes, that is the boat, but what became of the people?"

"Did you say that there was two on board on her?"

"Yes, a man and woman."

"Wa-al, I don't know anything 'bout the woman, but the man is all right."

"No young girl with him!" cried Blount, who cared nothing for the man, and would not have grieved if he had been told the scoundrel had perished in the storm.

"Nary gal! I reckon she must have gone under when the boat upset."

"She upset then?"

"Yas. I'll tell you how it was; you know thar was considerable of a storm last night?"

Blount nodded assent.

"And from the way the wind blew, I reckoned we were going to have a pretty big tide, and it kinder worried me, 'cos I thought the boys hadn't hauled the boats far enough up on the beach, so 'bout four o'clock I got up, dressed myself, and went out to see how things looked. The storm was 'bout over then, but thar was a dreadful heavy swell hammering in; it was pesky dark, but I managed to make out that thar was something a-driving in toward the land through the surf, and arter a time I saw that it was a boat, bottom upwards, and thar seemed to be a man clinging to it."

"I gave the alarm to once, and the boys come tumbling out. We got a boat into the water—and it was risky work, for the breakers were as big as a house—pulled out and diskivered that it was a man, sure enough, and the poor cuss was about gone; he couldn't have held on much longer; why, he hadn't strength to speak when we got him into the boat. If it a-hadn't been for us, I tell yer, nothing but his dead body would have ever come on this hyer beach, for the surf would have pounded out what little life remained!"

"But you saved him by your timely aid and he is alive?"

"Oh, I'll bet yer! up to the house yonder," and the fisherman pointed to the nearest hut. "After we got him inter the house I poured about a pint of whisky down him, which kinder made him brace up, and then we rolled him in blankets, and when we set off on our fishing trip this morning he felt 'pretty well, I thank you!'"

The blood leaped more quickly within the veins of the young man when he thought that the perpetrator of the outrage, which had evidently cost the unfortunate girl her life, was so near at hand. If she had found a grave beneath the rolling green waters, he, the actual cause of her death was still living—still able to pay the penalty that an outraged law would exact for the crime.

"In yonder house?"

"Yes, mister."

"Rather tall, slender fellow, dark complexion, long, black hair, and speaks with a slight accent like a foreigner?"

"Waal, no, mister, I reckon you are barking up the wrong tree," the fisherman replied. "This hyer cuss don't fill that bill at all. He's a leetle dark in the face, not quite so white as you are, but his hair is short, instead of long, and he speaks as good United States talk as either you or me."

Then it suddenly occurred to Blount that the long hair and the accent might have been a part of a disguise assumed by the unknown for the purpose of concealing his identity.

"Well, I only saw him for a few minutes and it is possible that I may be wrong in regard to these particulars," he observed.

"In course I don't know nothing 'bout that," the fisherman remarked. "All I know is what the feller looks like that I hauled out of the sea, 'bout as near death as a man could come and yet live to tell of it."

As the veteran made this remark, the conversation of the sailors in the boat regarding the vampire came back to Blount, and he could not help thinking that the "vampire," despite his supernatural character, had had a pretty narrow squeeze for his life.

"I have probably made a mistake about his personal appearance, but that is natural under the circumstances," Blount said. "I've not the least doubt that it is the man I mean, for that certainly is the boat. I am a sailor, and not apt to forget a craft that my eyes have once seen."

"It is rather an odd little egg-shell, anyway; I reckon a man must be rather keener of his life for to trust himself in sich a boat as that outside of Sandy Hook in a gale like was a-blowing last night," the fisherman remarked. "I reckon the best hundred-dollar gold piece that was ever shoved out of the mint wouldn't have been any temptation for me to do any sich foolish thing! The man must have been crazy for to do it, and carry a gal along with him, too!"

"Crazy!" the fisherman struck the key-note when he uttered that word, and the thought occurred to Blount that the stranger, by some wild words or actions, had given occasion for the man to form this opinion.

"Does there seem to be anything the matter with him—does he talk or act strangely?" he asked.

"Oh no, he's all right, although he must have gone through enough to have turned almost any man's head inside out; I tell you what it is, stranger,

it war a thousand to one ag'in' his gitting safe to the shore last night. Another thirty minutes would have settled his hash! If it hadn't been for the whisky I reckon he would have been a goner, anyhow!"

"I'd like to see him, if you haven't any objection."

"Not at all! come right along with me!"

The fisherman led the way and Blount followed, feeling sure that in a few moments he would solve one mystery at least.

CHAPTER XV.

AN EXPLANATION.

CASSANDRA LAMARDALE was a pretty girl; there wasn't the least doubt about that, as everybody admitted. She was rather below the medium size, a pronounced brunette, with sparkling black eyes, beautiful hair of the same hue, soft as silk and as lustrous as the plumage of a raven.

In disposition she was lively and agreeable, a perfect lady in every respect, although rather disposed to be outspoken in her views.

For a girl that from early childhood had been brought up to understand that she was the only daughter and, consequently, the sole heir of a man worth millions, she was remarkably free from all pride and ostentation.

In fact, at the fashionable boarding school where she had been educated, she was a source of wonder to both teachers and pupils, the majority of whom were rather disposed to bow down and worship the golden calf, for she was as unassuming as the poorest girl in the place, and many a time, when some companions had allowed an envious expression to escape, Cassandra would reply: "Why, girls, I am not any better off than the rest of you, as far as I know; people all say that my pa is dreadful rich, and I know that we live in a beautiful house and have horses and carriages and such things, but as far as I am concerned, it doesn't do me much good. I do not dress any better than the rest, and I'm sure that my allowance of pin-money is ridiculously small, for I manage to get rid of it long before the next quarter is due. Some of you imagine, no doubt, that all I have to do when I want money is to write to pa and he sends me a blank check, so that I can fill it out with whatever sum suits my fancy, but I tell you, girls, it isn't that way at all. My pa only allows me five hundred dollars a year, one hundred of which is paid to me in quarterly installments, and the balance I draw upon to dress myself. Now, girls, four hundred dollars a year isn't a very large sum for a millionaire's daughter to spend. Pa makes me a present of a handsome dress once in a while, or a piece of jewelry, but not often, for he says there is no telling what may happen in this uncertain world; and as many a man, fully as good as he is in every respect, supports a family upon the sum he allows me, I ought to have wit enough to make it supply my wants. Then, too, he says wealth is a peculiar thing; money takes to itself wings and flies away, you know; I may be a poor man's wife, one of these days, and if I have always been used to taking care of my money, I will know how to get along."

This was the way in which Redmond Lamardale had brought up the girl, and the result was she had arrived at the age of twenty-one as natural and as unspoiled by her position as any mechanic's daughter in the land.

Cassandra was sitting by one of the windows in the parlor, looking idly out upon the street, the last new book upon her lap, when the millionaire entered the room.

There was a troubled expression upon the face of Lamardale. The miscarriage of his plans in regard to the girl whom he had been at the trouble of bringing across the ocean annoyed him; it was a small matter, apparently, and yet the millionaire seemed to take it more to heart than anything that had occurred in years, although there had been many an up and down to the path which Lamardale had followed.

"Cassandra, I want to have a little serious talk with you," he said, taking a chair and seating himself opposite to the girl.

"Yes, sir," she replied, surprised by the expression upon his face, for it showed that a heavy weight rested upon his mind.

"I will come at once to the point. What do you think of this young gentleman who has been paying you so much attention—Mr. Almayne?" he questioned.

"Really, father, to answer you frankly, I must say I don't exactly know."

"Well, but isn't it about time you made up your mind? He has been paying you attention for quite a long while."

"Yes, sir, I know it."

"And can't you tell how you feel in regard to the matter?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I can do that easily enough," the girl replied, quickly. "I like him and I don't like him. He is very agreeable, a perfect gentleman, very entertaining, for he has been almost everywhere and knows something of almost everything. As a pleasant companion he is far superior to any of the other gentlemen with whom I am acquainted, but when I come to look upon him in the light of a suitor—as a man who is to be my husband, and with whom I must spend the rest of my days, then a doubt creeps in. I do not know exactly any reason

why I should doubt—why I should not be happy with him, but I have a strange sort of feeling in regard to the matter that I cannot account for on any reasonable grounds. I like him as a friend, and yet some secret instinct seems to tell me that as a husband I should not like him."

"Is there any other gentleman?" Lamardale asked, with a searching glance at the girl's face.

"Oh, no, sir!"

Truth itself dwelt in Cassandra's words, and the old man accepted the statement without question.

"Well, I did not know but you had seen some one else who pleased you better."

"No, sir, I like Mr. Almayne as well as any gentleman that I have ever met, in fact, I am pretty sure I like him better, that is, I enjoy myself more in his company. Of course, knowing your views in the matter, I have endeavored to look upon him as a man who would one day be my lord and master, but somehow I cannot accustom myself to viewing him in that light. I do not feel toward him as a girl should feel toward the man who is one day to be all in all to her."

"That is strange."

"Yes, it is very odd; but it is possible that I do not rightly understand the nature of the feeling which is called love. All that I know about the matter is what I have gained from books, and from the confidence reposed in me by some of my schoolmates. At all events I do not feel toward Mr. Almayne, or anybody else either, as the heroines of the novels feel toward their lovers, or as my girl friends feel toward the gentlemen to whom they are engaged. It is possible that I am an odd fish—everybody at school used to say I was—and that I am not capable of experiencing this passion, which is called love. It is certain that I never have yet."

"I do not think that you are in any important particular different from the rest of your sex," the old gentleman observed. "When the time comes for you to love, you will most certainly feel the passion, although it is possible that with your strange notions you may never experience the passionate love which is the stock in trade of the novelist. If you like the gentleman well enough to marry him, the love may come afterward."

"Yes; that is what all my lady friends say when they attempt to joke me about Mr. Almayne. When I tell them that I really do not love him, they all laugh, as if they did not believe me, and exclaim, 'Oh, but you will, dear, after you are married.'"

"Cassandra, I do not want to attempt to influence you in this matter at all," Mr. Lamardale remarked, "because I think every girl ought to be free to choose for herself, but as far as I know, the gentleman would make you a good husband. He comes of a fine family, is a man of means, a pleasant fellow personally, and I think he is attracted to you solely by your own gifts and not from the fact that you are my daughter, and he expects you will inherit my property when I depart from this life."

"Oh, I do not think he is a fortune-hunter, father; he certainly does not appear like one."

"And if he is one and weds you, Cassandra, under the idea that you will inherit my money, he will be sadly disappointed."

The girl looked surprised.

"The time has come, Cassandra, when a secret that concerns you closely must be revealed. I have always acted like a kind and indulgent parent to you?"

"Always, dear father!" and she knelt by his side.

"And yet I am not your father."

"Not my father?"

"No, my dear child, nor any relation. Your father and mother died when you were a baby. Heaven never saw fit to bless myself and wife with a child; chance threw you in our way and we adopted and reared you as our own; and that is something that neither myself nor wife ever regretted, for you have always been a dutiful, loving child; and now for the reason why you will not be my heiress. The greater part of the money that stands in my name is really not mine. I am but a trustee for another. My own fortune, although a goodly sum, does not entitle me to the name of millionaire. I shall leave you comfortably well off, but the man who marries you, expecting to get a million or more, will be sadly disappointed. I thought if you seriously reflected upon wedding Mr. Almayne I had better see him and explain how matters stand. The rightful owner of the money will doubtless soon claim it, and if any untoward accident should interfere to prevent the party from coming forward, I should feel bound to turn the money over to some deserving charities, for I could not conscientiously retain it."

"Perhaps it would be as well for you to speak to Mr. Almayne, and then if he persists in his suit it will be proof that he is attracted by myself alone."

"Very well, I will set about the matter at once," and the old gentleman departed, leaving the girl full of wonder.

CHAPTER XVI.

INSNARED.

WHILE Phenix had decided to try about the same game which had resulted so fatally to the murdered detective, yet he proceeded in a slightly different manner. Irving had gone in for a big display, swaggered about considerably for the purpose of making a decided impression, so as to attract the notice of the bird whom he desired to snare.

This was Phenix's idea also, but he did not take the trouble to disguise himself. He had been absent from New York for some time; the hot sun of the tropics had bronzed his complexion, he had allowed his mustache to grow and sported a small pointed chin-piece, after the foreign fashion, so that no one but an intimate acquaintance, like the superintendent of police, would be apt to recognize him.

As Irving had selected the Fifth Avenue Hotel for a headquarters, Phenix did likewise. He registered as Joseph Penia, Rio Janeiro, Brazil, and took occasion whenever opportunity offered, to display a big roll of bills, all apparently of large denominations, which he carried carelessly done up in a wad, in an inside breast-pocket of his coat.

Phenix, being possessed of a noble, commanding presence, well calculated to inspire respect at the first glance, made a most decided impression on everybody whom he encountered, and all the attaches of the hotel set him down as one of the Brazilian diamond kings, of whose wealth New Yorkers have a high opinion.

During his sojourn in South America the detective had become familiar with the language, and could converse quite freely.

So completely did Phenix impress the hotel people with the idea that he was possessed of "stacks of money," and was rather ignorant of the ways of a great city, particularly one so full of rascals as the metropolis of the New World, and all without putting him to the necessity of boasting about who and what he was, that three or four of them took upon themselves the task of warning the supposed stranger to be more careful in regard to displaying the money he carried.

Phenix thanked them for the caution, but replied in the calm tone of a man who knew not the meaning of the word fear, that whether in the wilds of his native pampas, or in Gotham's crowded town, he felt amply able to defend himself either from open or secret foes, whether his valuables or life were threatened.

The detective played the part of a rich foreigner who had come to New York expressly for amusement, to perfection. His tall form was seen in the public places; all the leading theaters were honored by his presence, nor did he neglect the gilded saloons where the bloods of New York and the excitement-seekers from afar meet to try their luck at beating the smooth and oily gamblers at their own game.

With the most superb indifference Phenix won or lost his money, always hazarding a goodly sum, as became a man to whom a thousand or two of dollars was a mere trifle.

Two weeks went by, and not a single bite did the detective have. Even the lesser rogues, the confidence men and bunco operators, fought shy of the prince-like foreigner, although not having the slightest suspicion that he was otherwise than what he seemed; but there was something about the man that awed them. No doubt he would turn out a rich prize if he could be entrapped, but they were afraid to run the risk, for the chances seemed to them to be those that accompany a tiger hunt—if the chase was not successful there was danger that the game would turn and rend the hunter. Phenix began to believe that the attempt to entrap the secret assassin would prove a failure.

"Either the fellow has given up business, or else he has penetrated my design and is going to keep quiet until I give up the chase, but if that is his intention, he'll have to wait a deuced long while," the detective mused.

That afternoon one of the hotel clerks, whom he met in the hall and stopped to converse with for awhile, called his attention to a lady who happened to pass at the moment.

"By the by, Mr. Penia, that is a countrywoman of yours," he said; "she is a Brazilian, and from Rio Janeiro, too, Miss Guadalupe Barcelona. She is stopping here, waiting for the coming of her father, who has been across the water on business. She's high-toned, I tell you! Just notice her diamonds! Magnificent, ain't they? Well, I should smile!"

Phenix took a good look at the lady, who was now ascending the stairs; from where he was standing he commanded a view of her face. She was rather tall, with a fine figure and impressive features. It could not be really termed a handsome face, the features, though regular, were rather coarse; but she was stylish-looking, a woman who would be apt to attract favorable attention everywhere.

"She's a stunner, ain't she?" the clerk continued; "a perfect lady, too. I had quite an agreeable conversation with her in the parlor yesterday. I'm the best hand at her language in the house, you know."

"Does she speak English?"

"Oh, yes, and with a very slight accent too.

but of course it is pleasant for her to meet some one who can converse with her in her own language. I mentioned the fact that you were also from Rio, and she said she had noticed you in the dining-room, and from your appearance conjectured that you were not an American; she inquired your name; but did not remember ever meeting you at home, when I told her what it was.

Phenix thought that it would be deuced runny if she had remembered either himself or his appellation.

"The lady is a stranger to me, but then you must remember that Rio is a big city."

"Oh, yes, but I say, wouldn't you like to make her acquaintance? She intimated to me that it would be agreeable to her."

"I shall be delighted to have the honor," Phenix replied.

The detective made it a rule to always make the acquaintance of everybody that he could, for in his peculiar business there was no telling when the most unlikely person might turn out to be of great importance. And he thought that while he was waiting for the game to walk into the trap he might as well amuse himself by making all the agreeable acquaintances possible.

"You'll enjoy her conversation, I'm sure," the clerk remarked. "She's a really brilliant girl—been everywhere and seen almost everything. She's style all the way through, and there isn't the least bit of nonsense about her, no stuck-up pride, although I don't doubt that she is just rolling in money! I suppose, anyway, that down in Brazil you are not so deuced particular—don't stand so much upon ceremony as we do here?"

"We are less formal, I presume."

"I guess it is that way in all hot-weather countries."

"I suppose it is due to the climate. The Southern races are not so much given to ceremony as the dwellers in the North."

"I will tell her the first chance I get, and I've no doubt she will want me to bring you up to her parlors. I tell you, senor, she lives in style. She's got about the best suite of apartments we have in the house. Any one can see from the way she spends her money that she must have one of those Brazilian diamond mines to draw upon, or else she would never be able to stand it."

Phenix again expressed the pleasure it would give him to become acquainted with the lady, and the clerk passed on.

Late that afternoon, just as the detective was finishing his dinner, the clerk came up, and Phenix guessed from the expression of satisfaction that appeared upon his jolly face, that he had succeeded in his design.

"It's all right," he said, leaning on Phenix's chair, and whispering in his ear. "I've fixed the matter. She said she would be delighted to make the acquaintance of any gentleman from Rio, so, as soon as you get through, I will carry you up, and in honor of the occasion I'm going to stand a bottle of the best wine that there is in the cellar."

"All right, I will do justice to it if the lady doesn't," Phenix answered.

And so, about an hour later, the detective was ushered by the hotel official into the reception-room of Miss Guadalupe Barcelona.

The lady was richly attired, wore most magnificent jewelry and conducted herself with an ease and grace that gave ample proof she had been accustomed to the best society.

After they had conversed together for some ten minutes, a grinning African made his appearance, bearing a tray upon which was a bottle of champagne and three glasses.

The clerk explained that he had taken the liberty of ordering the wine.

"Sort of a surprise party, you know," he added.

Miss Guadalupe laughed, shook her finger at the clerk and declared he was "a horrid fellow!" but it was plain that she was pleased with the attention.

"There's some dust in the glasses," she said, "uncork the wine, please, while I wipe them out."

Then, while the clerk proceeded to show his skill with the corkscrew, the lady took the glasses under the chandelier, and, turning her back to the two gentlemen, apparently proceeded to wipe the glasses with her handkerchief, but in reality she took a small vial, containing a colorless liquid, from her bosom, and with noiseless rapidity poured a few drops in the bottom of two of the glasses.

This act was performed so quickly and so skillfully that neither of the gentlemen had the slightest suspicion.

Then when the wine was poured out she managed to arrange it so that the glass which had not been tampered with fell to her.

"Now, gentlemen, I will give you a toast!" she exclaimed. "Success to all our wishes!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A REVELATION.

"BRAVO! Miss Guadalupe, that is a most excellent toast and I will drink it with a great

deal of pleasure!" the clerk exclaimed, and although Phenix merely bowed and smiled, he thought it would be a good thing for him if the toast could be realized.

Merrily the three pledged each other and then drained their glasses.

Phenix drank without a suspicion that there was anything wrong, for so shrewdly had the trick been worked that it would have required more than human knowledge to detect it.

But the moment the detective swallowed the wine and resumed his seat, following the example of the hotel clerk, he became conscious that he had been "dosed"—that there had been a drug administered in the wine, and he knew well enough what it was too, for no stranger was he to the peculiar way in which it worked upon the brain.

The effect produced upon the clerk was almost instantaneous, and was really wonderful.

He was occupying an easy-chair, and as the subtle drug coursed through his veins, he leaned back, totally regardless of the presence of the lady, and half-closed his eyes in a sleepy way.

"Well 'pon my word if that isn't 'bout the nicest wine I ever got hold of since I knew what wine was, you bet! Splendid wine—I think I could drink a couple of bottles of that wine, all alone by myself—splendid tippie that ish—I think—I think—that—I—dunno 'xactly what I think, but—bully wine"—and then, with a sort of hoarse grunt, the clerk lapsed into insensibility.

Phenix too had lolled back in his chair, his eyes half-closed, and a dazed, vacant sort of look upon his face; but it was evident the drug had not mastered him so completely as it had his companion.

Either he had not taken so powerful a dose, or else having a stronger head was more able to resist the bewildering influence.

The woman was quick to discover that though the drug had worked to a charm upon the hotel official, rendering him completely insensible to all that was passing around, yet, Phenix, although deprived of muscular power, was yet conscious of what was going on.

The woman, who had also sunk back into an easy-chair after drinking, now rose to her feet, with the look of a demon upon her face.

She came close to Phenix and glared into his face with eyes that fairly seemed to blaze with livid light.

"You understand me when I speak?" she exclaimed.

Phenix seemed to attempt to reply, but when he opened his mouth, he was like a man whose tongue had been removed, all he could do was to articulate some discordant sounds.

"If you cannot speak, nod!"

But Phenix plainly could no more do the one than the other, for when he attempted to obey the command, the best he could do was to move his eyes.

This she instantly noticed.

"Ah, well, it doesn't matter," she remarked. "I see you understand what I am saying and that is all I care about. You must have a head of iron to take such a dose and yet be able to understand what is going on around you while your muscular powers are so affected that you are not able to lift a finger."

Again there was a movement of Phenix's eyes, and a light shone therein, which, when it was noticed by the woman, caused her to burst into a peal of laughter.

"Oho, my stolid-faced, lion-hearted comrade!" she cried. "You would make short work of me if you were not bound hard and fast as if by an iron chain! You are a wonderful man—there are many wonderful men in the world, and yet there are very few of them who succeed in going through life without, at some time or other, happening to meet their master. You have met yours now, as I have no doubt you would frankly confess if you were able to speak. It is strange though, when one comes to think of it, the difference that must exist between you and this shallow-brained idiot," and she pointed contemptuously, to the clerk. "He is good to remain in this state of stupor for five or ten hours, while I have no doubt you would fully recover in an hour or two, if nature was allowed to have her way."

There was a world of menace in the intonation which the woman gave to the closing sentence of the speech, and Phenix, who plainly comprehended exactly what she meant, possibly would not have been able to repress a shudder if he could have moved a muscle.

"But for an hour or two, despite your strength—despite your wonderful skill and courage—you will be so helpless that a child could slay you without the least trouble. Both the time and place, too, are propitious for such a deed. We are not liable to be interrupted, but to make assurance doubly sure, I will lock the door and remove the key."

And by the time she had finished speaking the act was performed. Then she returned, drew up a chair and sat down in it, facing Phenix, and so near him that by simply stretching out her hand she could touch his breast.

"Now then, before the last act of this delightful comedy begins, permit me to say a few words and explain why it is that I have taken

upon myself to play a leading part and turn the comedy into a tragedy."

No movement on the part of Phenix, but in his eyes a peculiar expression, a far-away look, that puzzled the woman for a moment.

"Has the drug affected him differently from what it should? Is he dying?" she questioned.

It was little wonder the woman got this impression, for Phenix looked far more like a corpse than aught else.

"Do you understand me?"

There was a faint quiver of the eyelids; apparently the only way in which the man could give assurance that he was alive.

"It is very strange that he should be affected in this way," she murmured. "The drug has evidently thrown him into a trance-like state, rendered him incapable of moving, and yet he is able to see and understand all that is passing around him. It is a really marvelous case! But now to business without loss of time. Do you know me, sir?"

Again the movement of the eyelids.

"You do not, of course, but I know you. Joseph Penial. That is a very good name, and you are from Rio, too," she added, "but you are not a native of that city, not even a resident, and the name of Joe Phenix, the detective, would become you much better than the other. You were playing a bold and skillful game, my hero, and yet you were foolish to believe that such a man as yourself could be forgotten in so short a time. Oh, no, Phenix, you man-hunter, you have run down too many poor fellows—have made yourself too terrible a name to easily pass from the memory of men. You were an old friend of Irving, and when you returned from abroad and found that the hunter had been caught in his own snare, the engineer hoist by his own petard, you determined to try your luck. You would discover and bring to justice the unknown who laughed to scorn all the efforts of the police, and yet with all your wisdom you could do no better than to attempt to play the same game which had resulted so fatally to your old-time pal, and the end is, you are snared fully as easily as he was!"

"Oh, it's a rare joke, if you look at it in the right way!" the woman cried, with an outburst of merriment that sounded really fishish. "To think that you, Joe Phenix—Phenix, the renowned!—should be the dupe of so shallow a trick! And you walked into the trap without the slightest suspicion! Irving was caught in exactly the same way, excepting that I allowed him to make my acquaintance on the street, lured him to my den, and there drugged and killed him. I did not dare to try that game on you, for, warned by the fate of your brother detective, you would have been a fool indeed if you had not been upon your guard, but thanks to the good-nature of this meddling donkey of a clerk, the trick was worked to perfection."

"Phenix, I do not doubt that you must have been very near death a hundred times in the course of your life of adventures, but never since you came into this world of sorrow have you been as near as you are at this moment."

"You seek the assassin who slays the victims with a single blow, piercing the heart! The secret slayer, who has covered up the track so well that no one has yet succeeded in gaining the slightest clew. But you—you, my bold and vigilant Phenix, are more successful than the rest, for now you are face to face with the perpetrator of these deeds of darkness! Look well at me—cast your eyes with the sight of the face that you hoped to place behind a prison's bars!"

"Do you doubt my words? If so, behold the weapon with which the deeds were done!"

In the coils of her lustrous, jet-black hair shone a diamond cross, a beautiful ornament, fully three inches long.

She plucked it out, and lo! the pin, which had been hidden in her hair, was a polished steel dagger, nearly six inches in length, and a little larger round than an ordinary knitting-needle.

She brandished the weapon before the face of the detective, while her eyes seemed to glow with unnatural light.

"It is a toy, and yet it has drank the heart's blood of many a strong man, and hurried him before his time into the cold, damp grave!" she cried. "And now, Joe Phenix, it is your turn, and after you, this miserable fool, although he is barely worth the killing, but I crave blood—I cannot have too much of it; if I cannot get plunder, I can at least slake my thirst for gore! One blow is all I need, Phenix, one single blow, and I will pierce your heart at the very first stroke, for I know exactly where to strike. Now!"

And with determined arm she drove the dagger into his breast, right at the heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

BLOUNT dismounted from his horse the moment the fisherman's words had revealed to him that the abductor of the girl was near at hand; no need to fasten the animal, for he was too well trained to stir from the spot.

The fisherman was met upon the threshold by

his wife, a matronly-looking dame, with a good, honest face.

"Well, mother, how's the man?" the fisherman asked.

"All right, I guess; he wanted a cup of coffee a few minutes ago, and I made him a good strong one, which he took with a relish."

"That was right; that's nothing like a cup of strong coffee to put life into a man arter he has been out exposed to the weather," the veteran observed. "This gentleman has come to see him, mother; he thinks he knows him, leastways he knows the boat, and as the craft is the one he is arter, I reckon the man is too."

"You'll find him jest where you left him, upstairs in the back-room."

"Come right up with me, sir," said the man, leading the way to the upper story.

Blount followed, while the woman brought up the rear.

"In this room, sir," and the old salt opened the door, which was fastened only by a simple latch.

A step more and Blount would be face to face with the abductor; the blood in his veins fairly tingled at the thought, and, involuntarily, his hands clinched, anxious to take the ruffian by the throat.

He crossed the threshold, and, as he did so, an exclamation of amazement came from the lips of the fisherman, who was some three steps in advance.

The apartment was empty.

There was the humble bed, with its coarse covering, the impression still visible where the man had been lying, but the man himself was not to be seen.

"Hello, mother! I thought you said the critter was in here?"

"So he was—only a minit ago," and the woman looked around her with a bewildered air, as if asking where on earth her guest had gone.

"He must have come down-stairs without your seeing him."

"Sakes alive! he couldn't!" she declared, in answer to her husband. "It war only a minit ago I brought up his coffee, and he sot on the edge of the bed while he drank it; I axed him how he felt, and he allowed he felt pretty near all right; then I went down-stairs, and I've been in the room ever since. I didn't stir out of it, and he couldn't have come down stairs without my seeing him—that is jest as sure as we're all standing here!"

And as the stairs led right into the lower apartment, it was clear the woman was correct.

There was a small window at the back of the room. Blount advanced to it and looked out. Right under the window was a shed-like extension, and the moment the sailor saw it the mystery of the man's disappearance was revealed. It was perfectly easy, even for a child, to get out of the window to the shed and then descend to the ground.

"This is the way your man went," he remarked.

"Thunder! what on earth possessed the critter to git out of the winder?" the fisherman queried.

"He needn't 'a' bin afeared for to come down the stairs. We wasn't a-going for to charge 'im anything!" the good wife exclaimed, quite angry to think the stranger should have behaved so unhandomely after all her trouble. "We're Christian folks, we are, and we wouldn't have thought of taking money for helping a fellow-being that we had pulled out of the sea—drat the man! what kind of critters did he take us to be?"

Blount had guessed the solution to the riddle, although he did not take the trouble to enlighten the fisherman and his wife. The sandy track along which he had journeyed was in full sight of the window; the fellow was probably looking out when he rode by, caught sight of him, anticipated his errand, and proceeded to get out of the way as speedily as possible.

"Durned if I like this kind of business!" grumbled the man. "If I had known he was that kind of a feller, hang me if I would 'a' wasted either good liquor or good coffee on him."

"He can't have got very far off, if you say he was here only a few minutes ago," Blount observed.

"It isn't ten minits since I gave him the coffee!" the woman declared, stoutly.

"I'll go in search of him immediately. I will surely be able to overtake him, having the advantage of being on horseback. There's only two ways in which he can go, toward Sandy Hook or to Long Branch."

"Yes, he can't go anywhere else, for that's the ocean on one side and the South river on the other. Cuss me if I wouldn't like to have a leetle talk with him myself, jest for to tell him what I think of his meanness!" the veteran grumbled.

Blount hastened down-stairs and into the open air, closely followed by the annoyed couple, anxious to know what had become of their guest.

There was an old fellow mending nets a short distance away, and from where he sat he commanded a view of the shed and window.

Blount questioned him, but was unable to obtain any information, for the man protested

that not a soul had he seen, although at last he admitted, under a close cross-examination, that he had been so busily engaged at his work that a man might have passed by without attracting his observation.

Just as Blount succeeded in extorting this fact, the bell of a locomotive rung.

"Hallo! what train is that?" he asked.

"Up for York," was the answer.

"Has the man had time to get from the house to the depôt so as to catch that train?"

There was a difference of opinion in regard to this. The woman thought he had, the fisherman said, decidedly, that he had not, and the old fellow shrewdly threw a little light on the matter by remarking:

"It depends on how good the critter was on to his legs; mebber he mought, and then ag'in he moughtened."

Blount thought that the easiest way for him to ascertain the truth was to jump into the saddle and ride to the station, and this he lost no time in doing, first expressing his thanks to the honest couple for the interest they had taken in the search.

"But how 'bout this here boat?" the fisherman questioned as Blount vaulted into the saddle. "Is it yours?"

"Oh, that is all right; keep it for your trouble," the sailor replied, as he rode off. Blount made the gift with a free conscience, for he felt perfectly sure that the abductor of the girl would never dare to return to claim the property.

In a few minutes he reached the depôt. The depôt master was the only one around, and he was an old man, rather inclined to be stupid, and decidedly crusty in his manner.

He hadn't seen any strange, dark-complexioned man—had "a good deal too much to do to bother his head 'bout who got on the trains or who got off," and that was all the satisfaction that the sailor was able to obtain.

Blount rode back again toward the beach; he was convinced that his surmise was correct. He had got on the track of the man, and the fellow, catching sight of him, got out of the window and escaped by the train, and then a bright idea flashed into his head. He would ride to the telegraph office at Long Branch and send a dispatch to Mr. Lamardale, telling him to be at the dock in New York with the necessary officers, and arrest the abductor when he arrived on the boat which connected with the train at Sandy Hook. The boat took over an hour to run up from the Hook to the city, and if the old gentleman acted promptly the rascal might be trapped, thanks to the tongue of the lightning, even at the very moment that he was congratulating himself that he had given his pursuer the slip.

The operator promised to put the message right through when the necessity of haste was explained.

After this operation was performed, Blount turned his attention again to the beach. The man had come ashore, clinging to the overturned boat, but no clew had he gained in regard to the girl. If she had met a watery grave when the craft capsized, then her body ought to have come ashore somewhere in the same neighborhood.

And as Blount rode along, puzzling his wits over the matter, the remembrance of the broken mast of the boat occurred to him.

"And the sail, too!" he cried: "what became of the mast and sail? Evidently the breaking of the mast capsized the boat, both of the passengers were thrown into the sea, the man managed to get on the boat and so keep from sinking, why then may it not be possible that the girl clung to the mast and sail? Decidedly then my game now is to find out if any such thing has come ashore anywhere along the coast."

In pursuance of this plan he rode back to Galilee and recommenced his inquiries, this time seeking for a broken mast with a sail attached.

With the perseverance of a bloodhound he hunted for a clew, and at last, by a group of shanties, just at the edge of Atlanticville, he found what he sought.

"A mast and sail!" repeated an old, weather-beaten fellow who was mending a boat on the beach. "Ay, ay, messmate, I think I see'd a strange mast and sail this morning, a-spread out to dry by old Pete Shackleton's shanty. He lives over yander, on the South river, and when I see'd it, I reckoned he had helped himself to it, the old pirate! Don't you b'lieve a word he says, mister, for he'll lie out of it, if he kin, the blasted old shark!"

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE TRACK.

THANKING the man for his information, Blount went at once in search of the house of the "old pirate," as the fisherman had termed the person upon whose premises he had seen the broken mast and sail.

Blount had no difficulty in finding the spot, for everybody seemed to be well acquainted with Pete Shackleton, and what was singular no one had a good word for him; nearly all of whom Blount inquired the direction went out

of their way to take a fling at the old man, so that Blount naturally came to the conclusion that Shackleton must be a pretty hard case.

The house—which was nothing more than a two-storied shanty, built out of rough boards—occupied by this man of unsavory reputation stood all alone on a little point jutting out into the river.

A grizzled old sea-dog, whom Blount immediately guessed to be Shackleton, sat upon the end of an overturned boat, smoking a short clay pipe which appeared to be as ancient as its owner.

The old man surveyed the rider with the utmost unconcern as he came up, never taking the trouble to remove the pipe from his mouth.

Upon the grass by the side of the house, spread out apparently to dry, was a broken mast with a sail attached.

Blount's heart beat quickly as he recognized the object, for there wasn't any doubt in his mind that it was the mast and sail which had belonged to the boat.

"How are you?" said the sailor, as he pulled in his steed and halted at the edge of the place.

"Howdy?" grunted the old man.

"Had quite a storm last night?"

"Dunno," responded the other.

Shackleton possessed keen eyes, despite his years, and had noticed the glance of satisfaction which had appeared upon the rider's face when he caught sight of the mast and sail.

"I am in search of a boat which was blown 'round Sandy Hook in the gale last night."

"Wot do you come here for? Why don't you go over yander to the beach? You ain't green enough, are ye, to think a boat could travel over the land into this here water, no matter how big the blow?"

"Oh, that is all right; I know where the boat is."

"Oh, you do?"

"Yes, she lies up at Galilee."

"Wot are you a-wasting yer time a-chin-ning round here 'bout yer boat if you know whar she is? Why don't you go and git her and not waste yer breath?"

"The boat had a mast and sail in her when she came round the Hook last night, but when she came ashore this morning she was floating keel upward with only the stump of the mast left; the mast itself and the sail were gone."

"Ay, ay, that's the way things allers go in a blow."

"That's the mast and sail yonder."

"You lie, you son of a sea-cook!" cried the old man, laying his pipe down and rising to his feet in a sudden fit of rage. "Don't you dare to come here and say that I know anything 'bout yer blamed old mast and sail! How do I know that you ever had sich a thing? and as for that 'ere rag and bit of timber, why, I've owned it for a year!"

Blount understood at once the kind of man that he had run across, and he had been an officer aboard ship too long not to know how to take care of such a customer.

The sailor was a man weighing a hundred and fifty pounds, tough as a pine-knot, and knew how to "handle himself" as well as any bully that ever played cock of the walk in the fore-castle.

Without a word he dismounted from his horse, walked quietly up to the abusive Shackleton, and before that worthy comprehended what the stranger was up to, had him by the throat and shook him, as a terrier shakes a rat, until his teeth fairly chattered.

"I'm a liar, am I?" Blount observed, and then he gave the old ruffian another shake, "and you've had that almost new canvas a year, you scoundrel?" and he tightened his grip on the other's throat until Shackleton's knees bent under him.

"Gug—gug—gug!" gasped the old wrecker, almost strangled.

Then, satisfied that he had taken some of the insolence out of him, Blount let go his hold and the old fellow stumbled back and fell in a sitting posture on the boat.

His face for a moment was a study—fear and rage were strangely blended. As soon as he could get his breath he gasped:

"Wot in blazes do you mean a-coming here and a-treating me in this here way? I'll have the law on you, see if I don't! Do you s'pose you kin come here and choke me like a blamed hen and think that I am a-going to stand it? Not much, if I know myself—not if my name is Peter Shackleton. I'll make you sweat for choking me afore you're a day older, and don't you forget it, neither!"

"You mustn't be so free with that ugly tongue of yours. I do not allow any man to call me a liar with impunity!" the sailor answered. "I know this mast and sail has not been in your possession four-and-twenty hours, and I can easily bring witnesses to prove it, too!"

"Blast that measly Tom Hodges and hisson!" old Shackleton muttered. "I see'd the two a-spying round here this morning. Darn my skin! I don't git even with them for it! Why didn't they ketch their crabs and mind their own business?"

Blount guessed that one of the parties to

whom Shackleton referred was the man who had put him on the scent.

"But as far as the mast or sail is concerned I don't want either of them," Blount remarked. "I am in search of information concerning the girl who came ashore at the same time as the mast and sail."

The old man assumed an air of ignorance, but the sailor fancied he detected a slight twinkle in his eyes.

"A gal?"

"Yes, a young girl who was in the boat when it was blown around Sandy Hook, and who, when the boat upset, saved herself by clinging to the mast and so was borne ashore."

"Waal, nobody see'd no young gal spread out here to dry, did they?" old Shackleton asked, assuming a humorous tone.

"Where is she—you rescued her, I suppose?" asked the sailor, coming at once to the point.

"Wot do you ax sich a question for?" responded the old man, sulkily. "You know all 'bout it, in course. The sail and mast is yourn, and I pulled the gal outen the water, and mebbe killed her arterwards. It's a wonder you don't bring that up ag'in' me, you're so mighty smart!"

"Oh, I do not pretend to know everything, my friend, but as the body of the girl has not come ashore, it is reasonable to suppose that she did not perish when the boat was capsized, and as I had an idea that she might have been saved by using the mast and sail as a support, when I find those articles in your possession, I assume that it is not impossible you may know something of the girl."

"Waal, mister, I'll own up to them things; I found 'em on the beach, but thar wasn't no gal with them."

Blount would have been apt to believe that he was on a wrong scent had there not been something about the old man's manner which made him suspect he was not telling all he knew about the matter.

"But you found her, though, for all that?" he replied, fixing his eyes sternly on the old rascal's face.

"Oh, yes, of course I did! and I've got her here, hid right under this 'ere boat," and he rapped the wood with his hand, then he laughed hoarsely. "Say! you 'pear to be mighty anxious 'bout this here gal! Don't you want to hire me to look for her?"

Blount drew a long breath; the secret of the old man's stubborn denial was revealed. He wanted to make some money out of the matter.

"You shall be paid for your trouble, of course."

"Now you're talking! How much?"

"Well, any reasonable sum."

"Wot do you call a reasonable sum? that's the pint on which thar may be a big difference of opinion," observed the old man, with a grin.

"Oh, I will leave that to you."

"How does a thousand dollars strike you?"

"A thousand dollars!" cried Blount in amazement at the outrageous demand.

"That is wot I said; a thousand dollars; and I reckon from wot you say 'bout the gal she would be cheap at double the money."

Now, as Blount hadn't said a word about the girl's looks or qualifications, these words convinced him that the old man did know something of her, but of course such a sum as a thousand dollars was out of the question.

"You are crazy, old man! If you were to say five or ten dollars now I might employ you to search for her."

"Bah! what is five or ten dollars to a gentleman like me!" he exclaimed. "It will take a thousand to make it worth my while."

"Oh, we can't trade, so I'll search for her myself." Blount retraced his steps to where his horse stood and mounted him.

"Try all you like, and if you can't find her, then call on me with the money, and I'll see what I kin do."

"Oh, you're an old rascal, and I don't believe a word you say!" Blount cried, as he galloped off.

This was merely done to throw the wrecker off his guard, for Blount was convinced that the man *did* know something of the girl. What he wanted now was time to summon the banker from New York.

Again the electric wires were brought into play and a full account telegraphed to Mr. Lamardale.

The chase was getting interesting, for the sailor believed the end was near.

CHAPTER XX.

TURNING THE TABLES.

STRAIGHT for Phenix's heart was the blow aimed, and the stroke was given with all the power that dwelt in the assassin's frame.

It seemed as if a miracle alone could save the life of the human sleuth-hound.

But Phenix was one of those men who by means of brains and courage work miracles.

The glittering, bodkin-like dagger, sharp as a razor, penetrated the cloth of the coat and then, encountering a solid substance beneath, snapped in twain, close to the handle.

With a shrill cry of alarm the assassin re-

coiled, for she realized immediately that a surprise was in store for her.

Phenix smiled; he had suddenly recovered the use of his muscles, and the sleepy, stolid look which his face had worn, disappeared as if by magic.

"Oh, you devil! you have tricked me!" she cried, in bitter anger.

"I was Irving's comrade, but I do not think I am destined to share Irving's fate," Phenix remarked, speaking in the most matter-of-fact way, and just as if nothing uncommon had occurred.

"What manner of man are you? And by what miracle have you escaped?"

The woman had wrought herself up to a fearful pitch of excitement; her face was distorted with passion, and she trembled in every limb.

"Oh, I'm the ordinary kind of man—haven't any more brains than the law allows, or else I never should have tumbled into this trap so stupidly. I had an idea you would try the same game on me that had been so successful with poor Irving, but you see that is where I wronged you; I didn't give you credit for being as smart as you are. I own up! You fooled me most beautifully this time. I hadn't the least suspicion that there was anything crooked about the matter, and I walked into the snare with my eyes open, never dreaming of danger; but the moment I swallowed the wine I knew what was up, although when the stuff is administered in that way there is hardly any perceptible taste to it. It was an old acquaintance, and I recognized it. It must have been a pretty good-sized dose, judging from the speedy manner in which it floored my esteemed friend here," and he glanced at the hotel clerk, who lay back in the easy-chair as senseless as a log.

"But I am an old opium-eater. Years ago, when trouble nearly drove me crazy, I found relief in that lethe-producing drug, and became so used to it that I could take without harm a quantity large enough to almost kill a dozen men; but before I became an absolute slave a tide of fortune set in, and little by little I have weaned myself from its use; and now you will understand why the dose failed. I saw I was in a trap and I determined to turn the tables on you, and I flatter myself that I have performed that little job in a superior manner. Believing me to be helpless in your power, you threw off the mask, and during this short interview I have learned more about you than I could have found out by myself in a month, even if I had had great good-luck."

"Oh, you are a very devil!" the woman hissed, fiercely, and she brandished the useless weapon in the air, as though meditating another stroke.

"You cannot deceive me—you wear a breast-plate!"

And this was the truth. During one of his European trips Phenix had purchased a shirt of mail made of the once famous Milan steel; it consisted of a series of rings curiously linked together, and was proof against the point of any knife that was ever forged, and in fact the pistol-ball that would make an impression upon it would have to be discharged from a superior weapon.

"Oh, no, I have been dipped in the famous spring which made all the old-time heroes invulnerable to either steel or lead," Phenix answered, rising, and at the same time producing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

She recoiled and her eyes fairly flashed fire as she caught sight of the fetters.

"Come," he said, "hold out your wrists so I can snap on the bracelets. You have played a bold game—played it deuced well, too, but the end has come."

The woman burst into a hollow laugh, and never in all his experience did Phenix listen to merriment more strained or unnatural.

"Upon my word, Phenix, you are a terrible fellow!" she exclaimed. "If I had had any idea of what kind of a man you really are, I should have thought twice before I attempted to entrap you. Of course I knew you by reputation well enough; I knew that you had made some marvelous captures and that of all the man-hunters in the country the bold souls under the ban of the law dreaded you far more than any of the rest, but although I guessed you were far superior to your fellows, yet, as I flattered myself that I had more brains than all the detectives put together, I did not feel any doubt in regard to the result when I determined to measure strength with you. Irving was supposed to be a very king of detectives, and the knowledge that he had been put upon the trail was always enough to make the boldest criminal take heed, but skillful as he was, I entrapped and slew him without the least trouble."

"Let me warn you," Phenix hastened to say at this point, "to be careful how you speak, for as an officer of justice, I am bound to tell you as an honest man that any disclosures you may make to me will surely be used against you."

"Oh, what do I care?" exclaimed the woman, apparently reckless. "I have played a bold game and for a time laughed to scorn all the efforts of the authorities to trap me, and

now, when my time has come, why should I not die as game as I have lived? You yourself must acknowledge that I have made a good fight. You did not succeed in entrapping me by the use of your wits, but solely by accident. With all your skill and cunning you walked into the trap as blindly as though you were a green country boy instead of a man who bears the reputation of being the greatest detective that the country has ever known. Naught but accident, I repeat, enabled you to escape, an accident which it was impossible for the keenest wits to foresee or provide against. I am only mortal, I am not possessed of supernatural knowledge; how was it possible for me to guess you were an opium-eater and so able to take with impunity the drug which rendered your companion as helpless as a dead man? Bah! I can read the signs which predict the future as well as any one who breathes the breath of life! The fatal event shows me that my career is ended. Why, then, should I attempt to struggle against fate? It is useless! Man I can fight and conquer, but when fate steps into the lists it is as well to yield at first, as to be bruised and wounded by an unavailing struggle."

This speech confirmed Phenix in the impression which he had formed when the particulars of the mysterious murders first became known to him; the secret assassin was a little touched in the upper story. But he was glad to find she was disposed to take the matter so coolly, for he hated to have trouble with a woman, even though she was no better than a female fury.

"Well, it's the fortune of war, I suppose, so, if you will permit me to snap these little ornaments upon your wrists, we will be going," he remarked.

She shrunk from him and an expression of disgust and terror appeared upon her face.

"But why is it necessary to put on those horrid things?" she exclaimed. "I will go with you quietly enough—I will not attempt to resist—you see, I am perfectly passive—I am resigned to my fate; destiny itself fights against me; I realize the fact and know that it will be useless for me to struggle."

Phenix shook his head. He had been tricked in this fashion once before. A woman had begged to be spared the humiliation of going through the public streets with the handcuffs on her delicate wrists; he had consented, and the moment he was out of the house, the prisoner's confederates assaulted him and so enabled her to escape. If she had had the bracelets on the trick would not have been accomplished so easily.

"You will not?"

"No, madam, I regret that I cannot oblige you, for it is my rule to always put the bracelets on a prisoner."

"Oh, well, I suppose I must submit then, as I cannot help myself, but it is a shameful degradation."

She extended her wrist. Phenix, deceived by the apparent submission, bent forward to adjust the handcuffs, when, with lightning-like quickness, the woman dealt him a terrible blow between the eyes that staggered him back; falling against a chair he lost his balance and came to the ground. This gave the prisoner a chance to dart through the door into the adjoining room. In a twinkling Phenix was on his feet and threw himself against the door.

CHAPTER XXI.

BAFFLED.

PHENIX was a brainy fellow; it was not often that he met his match, but in this case the woman certainly had duped him.

After passing through the door she had both locked and bolted it upon the other side, and when the detective flung himself against it he could not stir it, being a solid affair, put together in a workmanlike manner, and not to be easily forced.

"The infernal vixen!" cried Phenix, greatly enraged, smarting under his defeat and the effects of the blow, which had been delivered with all the precision and force of a professional pugilist.

The detective had guessed the woman's game. From the other room, which was a bed-chamber, a door probably gave access to the entry, and while he was engaged in forcing an entrance into the apartment, she would be able to make her escape.

Phenix hesitated for a moment. Which door could he break open the easiest? That was the question he asked himself, and almost immediately decided that as the main door opened into the room, while the one he was at swung exactly the contrary, he would do better to keep on in his attack.

Drawing back a few paces he planted a powerful kick on the door, right beside the lock, which had never been made with the idea of resisting such an attack, and so the attachments gave way at once and the door flew open.

Only a minute or two had elapsed since the woman entered the room, but it was evident she had made good use of her time, for when Phenix rushed into the apartment the culprit had disappeared.

As he expected, a door led from the bed-

chamber into the hall, and an examination disclosed that it was locked and the key missing.

The woman had evidently passed out of the door into the entry, and by the device of locking the door after her, had most effectually put a stop to pursuit.

Phenix's resolution was soon taken. He had a stout knife in his pocket and he thought he could succeed in forcing back the bolt, as the lock was so arranged as to afford him an opportunity of working at it.

This operation was accomplished with very little trouble, and the detective found himself at liberty again.

That the woman would lose no time in getting out of the hotel he nothing doubted.

She was attired in a plain, dark dress, and as he had not noticed her hat or cloak in the inner apartment, he presumed she had caught them up in her flight, so she was fully equipped for the street, and would not attract attention by an unusual costume.

Straight, then, to the "Ladies' Entrance" of the hotel went Phenix, and there inquired of the colored man, who had charge of the door, if he had seen a lady go out, describing "Miss Barcelona."

"Yas, sah," responded the hotel Cerberus, "bout five minutes ago. You mean dat foreign lady, wid de big diamonds?"

"Yes; did she seem to be in a hurry?"

"No, sah, I didn't notice anything out of de common."

Phenix thanked the man for the information, slipped a quarter into his hand and went out into the street, hoping that he would be able from some one of the loungers, usually to be found around the outside of the hotel, to discover which way the fugitive had gone.

He secured a clew from the very first man whom he accosted, one of the hackmen whose coach stood by the edge of the pavement.

"A lady in black? Oh, yes, sir, she took Mickey Doolan's coach to the Twenty-third street ferry; she wanted to catch a train on the Erie road for Buffalo."

In order to be sure that there wasn't any mistake about the matter, Phenix got the man to give him as good a description as he could of the lady, for it didn't seem possible that she would be so foolish as to "give away" the route that she had taken.

The description tallied exactly with his bird, and when the detective reflected upon the matter he saw the game that the fugitive had made up her mind to play.

From the hotel, by means of a carriage, the Twenty-third-street ferry—the up-town depot of the Erie railway—could be easily reached in ten minutes. She calculated that she would have at least ten minutes' start of her pursuer; she could gain the ferry by the time that the trail was taken up—and if she made this conjecture it was correct, for Phenix had been detained fully ten minutes. To put the police machinery in motion to intercept her would take fifteen or twenty minutes more, and by that time she would be able to get out of the way, for that she had any idea of leaving the city the detective did not for an instant believe, but at the same time it wouldn't do any harm to send out a general alarm, requesting the police to detain "Miss Guadalupe Barcelona," so Phenix hurried to the telegraph station and sent a dispatch to the Central Office, then returned to wait the coming of the driver.

Not long was he kept in suspense. In about ten minutes a hack drove up, and the driver looked exactly like a man who would answer to such a name as Mickey Doolan.

Phenix accosted him and found that his guess was correct.

The man had driven the lady in black to the Erie depot, at the foot of Twenty-third street, but whether she had entered the depot or not, was more than he could say, as after he had been paid he drove immediately back to the hotel in order to keep an appointment with another customer, and so had not noticed where his fare had gone.

The detective thanked the man for the information and turned away.

"The game is up for the present," he muttered. "The whole thing was a plant to throw me off the track. She has not gone out of the city, but she would have been wise if she had done so, for, by Heaven! I'll have her, no matter how skillfully she may hide herself. New York is a big place to play at hide-and-seek, but that doesn't make any difference, for in the end a fugitive can be hunted down as well here as in the smallest village; it only takes a little more time; that is all."

Phenix was considerably nettled by the result of this affair. In all his professional experience he had never been so skillfully beaten, but the fact only made him more determined to turn the tables upon his cunning adversary, for he felt that she was a foeman worthy of his steel.

Re-entering the hotel he took the superintendent to one side and explained to him all that had occurred. The astonishment of that gentleman was great.

"Upon my word I never was so completely tricked in my life!" he declared. "I'm an old

hand at the business and I thought I could detect an imposter without much trouble, but I must own up beat in this case, for I had not the slightest suspicion that there was anything crooked about the woman."

Then the two hastened up-stairs in hopes to secure a clew.

The clerk was still in the easy-chair, insensible to all surroundings.

"The dose was a strong one, and it will be eight or ten hours before he recovers from the effects of it," Phenix remarked.

"Is there any danger of serious results?"

"Oh, no, nothing more than a dull headache, just as if he had been on a prolonged spree, that's all."

Then, at Phenix's suggestion, the clerk was placed upon the bed, so that he might be comfortable during his enforced sleep.

A large Saratoga trunk stood in a corner of the room.

"How could a man suspect that the party wasn't solid, coming with a trunk like that, worth twenty-five or thirty dollars?" exclaimed the superintendent with a grimace.

The trunk was locked, and when Phenix tested its weight he remarked how heavy it seemed.

"Oh, yes, that's the old game; when we come to open it we'll find that it is full of brickbats and such rubbish," the hotel man observed, dolefully. "The trick hasn't been played for so long that I had really began to believe it had died out."

The superintendent had a bunch of small keys and just by chance one of them happened to fit the lock, so they were able to open the trunk without violence.

The hotel official was correct in his guess; the trunk was filled to the brim with bricks carefully wrapped in rags and paper.

"Hang me if I understand it, though!" the superintendent exclaimed. "She has only been here a few days and the trunk is worth about enough to cover her bill."

"Her game was not to swindle your hotel, but to get me into a trap so as to be able to put me out of the way," Phenix remarked; "but after the tight squeeze she had this time I reckon she won't be apt to try the game again."

Being now satisfied that no further information could be gained in the hotel, the detective posted to the railway depot at the foot of Twenty-third street and there made diligent inquiries in regard to the woman in black, but not the slightest bit of intelligence could he gain.

Both the ticket-seller and the gate-keeper, who had been on duty since six o'clock, were perfectly sure that no such woman had been seen by them.

"It is as I expected," muttered Phenix, as he turned away, "nothing but a 'plant' to throw me off the scent if I was in hot pursuit. Well, the first trick is hers, but one trick don't make a game, and as she knows me in my own proper person, it is now in order for me to get down to real work. Joe Phenix must vanish for awhile, and in his place a second detective must rise more potent than the first!"

CHAPTER XXII.

LESBIA'S ADVENTURE.

AND now we must return to the girl upon whom fortune had frowned so perversely ever since her arrival in the New World.

From the time when she had fallen in a swoon on the beach, exhausted by the terrible struggle with the waves, until she woke to consciousness in what was apparently the cellar of a house, all was a blank.

When she recovered her senses she found herself lying upon a little bed, with an old man and woman bending over her.

A small lamp, placed upon one of the stairs that led to a trap door, dimly illuminated the scene.

The old woman had bathed her face with camphor-water, and under this simple treatment consciousness soon returned.

Lesbia looked around in amazement; the dingy apartment, the ceiling, so near that a tall man could not have stood upright, the earth walls, the utter absence of windows, as well as the uncouth appearance of the old couple excited her wonder, and she could not possibly imagine what had become of her.

The fisherman and his wife, watching her with the eyes of hawks, noted the opening of her brilliant orbs and comprehended that reason had once again resumed its sway.

"Do you feel better, deary?" croaked the old woman, endeavoring to soften her hard features into a sympathetic glance.

"Where am I?" was the natural question of Lesbia, as soon as she recovered strength enough to speak.

"Oh, you're all right, ducky! don't you be afeard!" replied the old man.

"But an awful tight squeeze you've had of it, you poor thing," the woman remarked. "I tell you what it is, my dear, it was a lucky thing for you that my old man and me happened to

be a-passing along the beach and see'd you a-lying there, as cold and as stiff, jest for all the world like you was dead, but we foted you along with us, and I reckon now that you've got yer eyes open, and kin use your tongue a little, that you'll cling to life for a while longer, anyhow."

"But you mustn't fatigue yourself by talking much, or else the doctor says you'll be apt to slip your cable and slide into the other world, for s'ra," observed the man.

"The doctor! has there been a doctor to see me?" Lesbia asked, astonished.

"Oh, yes, I reckon he's been here three or four times—I ain't he, old woman?" Shackleton replied, with a wink to his wife.

She was quick to understand his meaning.

"Yes, yes, and if it a-hadn't been for the stuff he forced down your throat, you would never have come to life again."

"Why, how long have I been here?" she asked, amazed, for she was not conscious that there had been any great lapse of time since the moment when she fell fainting upon the beach.

"I'mme see! is it three days or four, old woman?"

"Four," responded the hag, speaking in such an honest way that Lesbia did not for an instant doubt the assertion.

"Four days," she murmured, "and it does not seem to me as if it had been more than four hours."

The wrecker chuckled in his sleeve, for he saw that the girl was completely deceived.

"Waal, you see that is because you have bin out of yer head, a-raving away here like all possessed! Fact! I never thought that you would come out of your crazy fit, but the doctor said you would, and it 'pears he was right."

"And, sakes alive! chill, you've no idee how glad me and my old man was when we see'd you were a-coming to. Why, it was only yesterday that I sed to my old man, sed I, 'Lands! if that gal dies here outo our hands, won't it be a downright shame!'" declared the woman, lying with an ease and art that really excited the admiration of her confederate.

"Oh, I am not going to die, for I feel quite well. I am weak, that is all, but I am getting stronger every moment, and I think I can get up!"

"Oh, lands, no!" screamed the old hag. "The doctor said as how you wasn't to be moved for a week!"

"Yes, he said it would be your death if you attempted to get up!" the man added.

Lesbia was amazed, for now that the faintness had passed away, she felt about as well as usual, and not at all like one who had been confined to a sick-bed for the better part of a week.

"I think the doctor must be wrong, for I do not feel at all unwell, and I am sure I feel quite strong enough to get up."

"Better mind what the doctor says; he knows, and since you have been saved from an awful death you ought not to fly in the face of Providence by trying to do what you hadn't oughter," the wrecker's wife remarked.

"Yes, and 'ticularly when there isn't any need of it!" declared the old man. "Now, that you kin talk, you kin tell me about your friends, and I will send word so as to let 'em know where you are."

"Yes, deary, and you can stay here, nice and comfortable, until they come for you," added the old woman, with a leer.

The game that this well-mated pair decided upon playing when they discovered the girl lying helpless upon the beach was an extremely simple one. From her ladylike appearance, they thought she must be a member of the upper ten, and they concluded by getting her into their clutches they would be able to get a good sum of money from her folks as a reward for their "kindness," and it was their intention to hold on to the girl until a "stake" was forthcoming.

Now Lesbia, although nothing but a child and one who had mingled but little with the great world, yet being well educated, she was no simpleton, and then too she was gifted with an unusual amount of common-sense, besides possessing the peculiar instinct so common to womankind.

The impression produced upon her by these people into whose hands she had fallen was not favorable. She distrusted them; their evil faces impressed her most unfavorably, and so she briefly said she could not comply with their request. She had no friends to whom she could send; she was all alone in the world and had no one but herself to depend upon. She did not deem it necessary to relate the whole of her story. She knew that she was to be met by some one upon arriving at New York, and that was all.

She further said she did not wish to trespass upon their kindness, but would go to the city as soon as she was well enough, and she felt sure that it would not take long for her to recover her strength.

"Well, you'll have to stay for a couple of days anyway," the old man replied, with an ill-grace, "for the doctor is away and will not return until then, and he sed if we let you go, your death would lie at our door, and it's by his

orders, too, that we fixed up this place for you, for he sed you must be kept where the daylight couldn't get at you, 'cos it would be apt to throw you into a brain fever."

"It is very strange," the girl murmured, perplexed, for her instinct told her that there was something wrong about the matter. "I know I am strong enough to get up, and I feel sure I can take care of mys lf. I haven't a great deal of money, but enough to pay you for your trouble, so if you please I will get up and go away."

The old couple shook their heads in decided disapprobation.

"Oh, we couldn't think of letting you go till the doctor comes, 'cos if anything was to happen to you folks would blame us, and maybe the officers would put us in jail," the wrecker exclaimed.

Lesbia was not in the least deceived by these specious words. She understood that she was a prisoner and would not be allowed to depart, though why she was detained, and how long her captivity would last she could not guess.

With a shrewdness that few would have believed could have dwelt in so innocent a maiden, she did not make any further objections, but appeared resigned to her fate. The fisherman and his wife were completely deceived, and after a little more conversation retired, advising the girl to get all the sleep that she possibly could, saying that they would not disturb her until she called for them by knocking on the ceiling.

"When you get hungry and feel like a good cup of tea, jest poud away and I'll fetch it to ye," was the parting injunction of the old woman.

They did not remove the lamp, for they were so completely deceived by the girl that they did not dream that any idea of flight was in her mind.

But with the return of her reason came the firm determination to escape from her prison-house as soon as possible.

When she attempted to get up, though, she found that she was still quite weak; she had miscalculated her strength, so she laid down again.

And then, after an hour or so, she began to feel sleepy, and, closing her eyes, was soon wrapped in a strength-giving slumber.

She slept until the day was well advanced, and when she awoke she felt undeniably hungry.

Summoning the old woman she said she would be glad to have a cup of tea.

Mrs. Shackleton hastened to prepare a simple meal, and after Lesbia had eaten it, she felt like another girl.

She was careful, though, not to allow this fact to become known, for she did not wish her jailers to take any extra precautions so as to make it more difficult for her to escape.

So, after eating, she laid down again upon the bed, and the old hag departed, perfectly satisfied that the girl was disposed to be contented.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN ADVANCE IN FORCE.

AFTER sending the dispatch Blount sat down in the waiting-room of the depot; nothing more could be done until he heard from New York. He was convinced he was on the right track: the old scamp had possession of the sail and mast, and from the way in which he had spoken of the girl it was clear that he knew what she was like. Blount thought he could guess the man's scheme. The unfortunate maiden had come ashore in an almost insensible state and Shackleton, happening to be prowling along the beach, came across her; thinking a reward might be offered for her discovery he had conveyed her to some secure place and was determined not to reveal where she was until he was well paid for his trouble.

Blount had calculated that it would take about two hours for his message to reach New York and an answer to come, and so, when the end of the time approached, he sauntered out on the platform to be in readiness for the dispatch.

He was at the main Long Branch depot where the "all-rail" route from the city comes in, and as he reached the platform a train from New York drew up to the station; to Blount's astonishment Mr. Lamardale, accompanied by the old lawyer and a couple of rather rough-looking men got out.

"I received both your dispatches, all right," he said, "but the infernal telegraph company delayed the first message so that we were too late to intercept the boat. I hurried immediately to the main office of the Western Union to wire you and there received your second dispatch, and, luckily, we just had time to catch a train, so here we are, ready for business. These two gentlemen represent the law," and the old banker smiled while the two, who looked more like prize-fighters than officers of the law, grinned and winked in a highly significant manner.

"From your dispatch, brief as it was, I gathered that the party we have to deal with is inclined to be ugly," continued the banker, "and in all such cases I have always found it was good policy to advance in such force as to pre-

clude resistance from being offered. If we went alone the fellow might laugh at us, but with these two gentlemen to back our cause, I've no doubt when our men discover how matters stand he will be inclined to listen to reason."

And Blount, when he took a good look at the muscular and determined-appearing fellows, came to the same conclusion.

"We had better get ahead as soon as possible," the lawyer suggested, "as we have no time to lose if we mean to conclude the business before dark."

Blount explained that a carriage must be procured, and this was soon done. The four gentlemen got in, the young sailor mounted his horse, put himself in the advance, and off they went.

Before starting the lawyer was careful to whisper in Blount's ear:

"Stop the carriage far enough from the house so that the driver will not be able to either overhear or see what occurs. We may have to proceed a little irregularly in this matter and we do not want any witness to make trouble afterward."

Blount understood the necessity that there was for this, and so halted the coach when they arrived at a point about a quarter of a mile from the house of the old wrecker.

The coachman did not regard the invasion with any particular curiosity, for he took the party to be on a real estate excursion, looking for a site for a new summer hotel, or something of that sort.

But old Shackleton was not in the least bit deceived. The moment he saw the "army" advancing over the sandy track of open country, and recognized Blount in the advance, he anticipated trouble.

He was occupying his usual seat upon the boat, and had got well into the enjoyment of a fresh pipe when he made the discovery.

"Old woman, old woman!" he yelled, "here's that pesky young cuss b ck and he's got a big crowd with him. Jest bolt and bar the doors, for I'll bet they mean mischief; if they were a-coming to do the fair thing by me they wouldn't bring sich a gang as that 'ere along!"

Shackleton and his dame had a conference after Blount's departure, so the woman understood exactly how matters stood.

While she made the fortress secure, the old man retained his seat, quietly puffing away at his pipe.

Lamardale had a brief and authoritative way with him, like the majority of men who have become possessed of a great deal of money, and understand how much money can accomplish.

He walked straight up to the wrecker and looked him squarely in the eye, thereby causing Shackleton to scowl in an extremely ugly way.

"There's the mast and sail—now where is the girl?" he exclaimed, sternly.

"W'ot gal?" growled the other.

"Come, come, no nonsense, my man!" exclaimed Lamardale, in a tone like a master addressing his slave. "You know what girl I mean and where she is well enough!"

"Oh, do I?" replied the old fellow, rather awed by the manner of the other: "p'haps you know better 'bout the thing than I do myself?"

"The presence of that mast and sail on your premises is ample proof that you possess a knowledge of the matter, and I give you fair warning that I am not in a humor to stand any nonsense, and therefore the quicker you tell all you know, the better it will be for you."

"Did this young feller tell you w'ot I sed?" asked Shackleton, nodding his head toward Lamont.

"In regard to the thousand dollars that you demanded?"

"That's it—that's the p'int!"

"You are crazy, man! If you had said a dollar, now, for your trouble—"

"Oh, what are you giving me?" cried the old man, in a tone of deep disgust. "A dollar! What kind of a man do you take me for, anyhow? A dollar! Well's a dollar to me! Why, it ain't enuff to pay for the rum for the boys."

"Well, I think you and your boys will have to do without the rum if you depend upon getting any money from me to pay for it. Come! I'll give you just three minutes to answer my question—where is the girl?" and the millionaire took out his watch, and sprang open the case while Shackleton surveyed him with a mysterious scowl.

"One!" counted Lamardale.

"Ain't I going to have anything for my trouble?" growled the old man, hardly knowing what to make of these summary proceedings.

"Nothing at all, sir, excepting that if you are not careful how you conduct yourself you may secure snug lodgings in the nearest jail; two!"

"Jail! you be hanged!" Shackleton yelled, rising in a sudden fury. "I reckon that I ain't done nothing for to be put in jail for! You can't come here and skeer me so easy! Who are you, anyway? I don't know you—I never saw

you afore, and I reckon you don't own the hull State, for all you talk so big."

"The time is pretty nearly gone," cautioned Lamardale.

"Oh, w'ot kin you do? You can't skeer me, nohow you kin fix it!"

"Three!"

"Three be blowed! w'ot do I keer?"

"Arrest him!" the banker commanded.

The two men seized the fisherman with a quickness that took him by surprise, and before he could collect himself for a struggle, a pair of handcuffs were snapped upon his wrists, and one of the men, threatening him with a short club, which he produced from under his coat, warned him that if he attempted to "cut up rusty," he'd have a head put on him which he wouldn't get rid of for a month.

Shackleton fairly foamed at the mouth with rage. The old man had had several tussles with the local officials within the last few years, and as these worthies, being about as worthless as the usual run of village officials, had feared to enrage the so-called desperate old man, he had always come out first best. But these strangers were evidently men of different metal and not to be frightened by words.

"Now, then, will you tell me where the girl is, or must we lug you off to jail and then break into your old shanty?" Lamardale demanded.

"You don't d'rel you ain't got no warrant!" the wrecker howled.

"Ain't we? well, now, old buffer! that is jest whar you are out, for we've got a hull pocket-full!" cried one of the men.

"Governor, 'tain't any use to waste words upon such a cuss as this!" exclaimed the other. "If he opens his head again I'll fetch him a lick that will shut him up for a week. Just say the word and we'll smash in the ranch as if it was an egg-shell!"

"Oh, you will, will you?" cried a shrill voice, and Mrs. Shackleton appeared at one of the upper windows with a double-barreled shot-gun. "Take off them handcuffs and get out of here, or I'll put a charge of buckshot inter your hides, you bloody-minded villains!" And she brandished the gun in a threatening manner to give due effect to her words.

But she had a terrible gang to deal with, as she speedily discovered, for no sooner had she finished her speech than, without a word of warning, both of the men drew revolvers from under their coats and opened fire on the window.

The moment she heard the bullets whistling through the air, followed by the dull thud as they entered the wood of the house, with a scream of horror she dropped the gun and fled.

Having thus routed the garrison, the men rushed up to the door and with a few vigorous kicks stove it in.

The fortress was captured.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SURRENDER.

WHEN old Shackleton witnessed the utter discomfiture of his better-half, who on several occasions had "held the fort" successfully against half a dozen local officers, no one of whom dared to run the risk of getting a charge of buckshot in his precious body, he realized he had fallen into the hands of men who "meant business, every time," and immediately came to the conclusion that discretion was the better part of valor.

"Hol' on, hol' on!" he cried; "for goodness' sake, don't tear the hull house down! I'll g'in in to once, without making any more time 'bout it, but I think it's a cussed shame that you ain't willing to give me something for my trouble."

"Ah, it is rather late in the day to talk that way," Lamardale remarked. "If you had commenced by being reasonable, I should have been willing to pay you a trifle if you have taken good care of the lady."

"I wouldn't have hurt her for the world!" the old rascal protested. "She was a leetle flighty—a leetle teched in the upper story, 'cos she had an awful night of it, and I didn't think it was right to let her go a-wandering 'bout, for fear she mought git inter bad hands, you know, who, p'haps, would hurt her, so I jest locked her up till I could find out 'bout her friends."

The face of the banker changed, and it was evident he was much agitated at the intelligence.

"Do I understand you to say that her mind is affected?" he asked.

"Yas, a leetle, but nothing to hurt, I reckon. You see, she had a terrible time. She came ashore, clinging to that mast and sail, and jest had strength to crawl up on the beach, then fainted dead away, and when I came along the tide was almost up to her. It was a flood tide and making in strong, you know, and if I had been twenty minutes later she would have been a goner, for the water would have got hold of her, and as she wouldn't have been able to fight ag'in' it, the surf would soon have battered the life out on her."

"But she is safe now?" Lamardale demanded, anxiously.

"Yas, a leetle weak and light-headed, but

that is all. Why, the gal couldn't even tell me the name of her friends, although I offered for to send a message for to tell 'em where she was."

The banker understood the meaning of this; in bringing the girl across the ocean both he and his agents had been careful to keep in the background.

"Where is she? lead me to her at once. If I find your story to be correct and you have taken good care of the girl, you shall not lose anything by it."

The face of the old man brightened when he found he was not going to be completely "left," to use the vernacular.

"Say, can't you have these leetle bracelets taken off?" Shackleton asked, holding out his manacled wrists. "I never did keer much for jewelry, anyhow."

"Take them off," commanded the banker to the men who held possession of the doorway, and who, having secured entrance, were waiting for orders.

One of them came up to the old man and removed the handcuffs.

"I'm ever so much obleeged to ye," he remarked.

"And now produce the girl!" cried Lamardale.

"All right; she's down into the cellar; I put her there 'cos she was a leetle restive, and I didn't know but she would take it inter her head to run away."

The attacking party looked at the shanty inquisitively. Built on the level ground, there was not the slightest indication that there was any cellar under it.

The old man chuckled; he guessed the thoughts that were passing in his visitors' minds.

"Don't see much signs of a cellar, do ye? I reckon that if I had chose to be ugly 'bout the matter, all on ye's would have been a long time a-finding it out."

Then the old man led the way into the house, and as he entered, the woman, who had descended to the lower floor, met him with loud complaints.

"Did you see these devils shoot their pistols at me?" she cried. "It was a mercy that I wasn't killed! But I'll have the law on 'em, if there's any law in Jersey; see if I don't!"

"Oh, shet up, old woman! you made a good fight, but they were too much for you; and that's all there is 'bout it. I don't bear no malice, though they did clap the brackets onto me. They are going to do the right thing by us, when they see we didn't hurt the gal, but took as much keer on her as if she had been our own darter."

The woman was quick to alter her tone at this information.

"Well, I guess we did! the poor, dear child! Oh, good gentlemen, we have treated her exactly as if she had been our own flesh and blood, and she will tell you so when you see her, although she may complain because we didn't let her go; ut, gracious! we didn't dare to, 'cos she was all mixed up 'bout where she was going—couldn't tell 'bout her friends or nothing, and we was afeard that some harm might come to her. We put her down in the cellar, 'cos that was the only safe place in the house; she went as quiet as a lamb, gentlemen, we didn't have a bit of trouble with her. We told her that we'd send for her friends as soon as possible, and fixed up a bed so that she would be nice and comfortable. The cellar is dry, and although it's a leetle dark, it's a right nice place for anybody w'ot's a leetle sick."

"Don't waste any more time, but conduct us to the girl at once!" Lamardale exclaimed, impatiently.

"Certainly," responded Shackleton, pulling aside an old piece of oilcloth that was laid upon the floor in front of the stove, and revealing a trap-door beneath; when this was lifted, a flight of steps leading down to the floor of the cellar was exhibited.

"The stairs are perfectly safe," observed old Shackleton, as he descended into the underground apartment.

Lamardale followed closely upon his heels. But hardly had they disappeared from view when a cry of alarm came from the old wrecker.

The cellar was empty—the girl gone.

The little cot-bed and chair, which had been placed in the apartment for the accommodation of the prisoner, were there all right, but the girl herself was not to be seen.

The cellar was not only about ten feet square, being merely a hole scooped out in the earth, and about six feet deep. There was no way of lighting the place except by opening the trap-door.

Shackleton was not long in discovering how the girl had managed to escape.

As the old shanty was terribly out of repair, the gutters of the roof, instead of carrying the water away from the house as they ought to have done, discharged nearly all of it near one corner of the building, and, as a natural result, the water had made a hole through the earth, into the cellar. The girl, upon discovering this fact, had found it an easy matter to tunnel through the loose earth until she made a passage large enough for her to creep out.

Lamardale was terribly disappointed at this unexpected misfortune. At first the suspicion

entered his mind that the old couple were deceiving him, and that the girl had not been with them at all, but their disgust and wrath upon discovering that the girl had been sharp enough to escape, were evidently genuine.

"I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes!" Shackleton declared. "Why, boss, when the old woman and me hist-ed her down into the cellar she didn't seem to have as much life into her as a sick cat! Durn me, if it don't beat my time!"

"She war a-playing 'possum!" declared the old woman, shrilly. "We war a couple of fools not to suspect that she war up to some mischief when she took the matter so quietly."

"We must go in search of her at once!" Lamardale exclaimed, as he ascended from the underground apartment. "Can you form any idea how long it is since she escaped?"

The two shook their heads dubiously.

"Fact is," said the old man after a pause, "neither the misses nor me went near her arter 'bout eleven o'clock. 'Bout the time the old woman went down to see if she would take a bite of something, thinking she might be hungry. She said she would take a cup o' tea and some bread and butter, and the old woman fixed it for her; so she was there then; she was lying on the bed, a-pretending to be all used up, but now I reckon that was all put on fer to throw dirt in our eyes, and it did, too, blame her!"

"Where can she have gone? Ah, if the poor child had only waited; but then how could she know that friends would come so soon?" Lamardale exclaimed, visibly affected.

"Gov'nor, she can't be very far off!" the old wrecker cried, thinking that he perceived a way to make some money out of the affair after all. "If we all pitch right in we'll be sure to find her, or, anyway, if we don't find her, we can find out which way she went, for somebody must have seen her!"

"No doubt about it, and we must lose no time. I'll give a hundred dollars to the man that finds the girl!" the New Yorker exclaimed.

"I'm in for the job!" Shackleton cried, with alacrity.

Five minutes later the party were upon the quest, Lamardale, Blount and the old lawyer going in one direction, the muscular New Yorker in another, and Shackleton setting off by himself.

But not the least bit of success attended any of their efforts, and up to eleven that night, when the search was reluctantly given up, not the slightest trace of the girl was obtained.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PLOTTERS AGAIN.

RETURN we again to the cosy sanctum of Dec Almayne. The clocks have just marked the hour of eleven, and the owner of the mansion, ensconced in a great easy-chair, was helping himself to brandy and soda from the bottles placed upon a small table drawn up to his side.

Almayne, always colorless, was paler even than usual, and he seemed nervous and out of sorts. He tossed off the brandy—the best that money could buy—as though it was nothing but water, and it did not seem to produce any more effect upon him.

He had just come in, and had hardly got comfortably seated, when the servant whose business it was to attend to the front door came with the intelligence that Mr. Culpepper desired to speak to him.

"Show him up," commanded Almayne.

In a few minutes Culpepper entered the room, being careful to close the door tightly behind him, and by this movement he gave Almayne to understand that he had something of importance to communicate.

A serious look, too, sat upon Culpepper's face, and any one with half an eye could see that he was materially disturbed.

"Take a chair, old fellow, and help yourself to the brandy," Almayne said. "You must excuse my asking you to wait upon yourself, for I'm all tired out—played out, expresses it exactly."

"That's all right," Culpepper rejoined placing a chair by the side of the table, opposite to where the host sat, and helping himself to a liberal draught of the good liquor. "But what is the matter?" he asked, after draining the glass. "What have you been up to?"

"Oh, I fell in with a jolly party at the club this afternoon, and to pass the time away we indulged in a little draw-poker and we became so interested in the game that we played from about three o'clock up to ten."

"Well, that was a long sitting!"

"A deuced expensive one for me, too!"

"How was that?"

"Hang me if I know! The very deuce seemed to be in the cards. If I held a good hand, some one else was sure to hold a better. Never in all my life did luck run more counter."

"Did you lose heavily?"

"Rather!—ten or twelve thousand!" responded Almayne, with a wry face, and then he sought consolation in another dose of the brandy.

Culpepper whistled; his way of expressing vast astonishment.

"Well, well, you were put in the hole!"

"Yes, and between you and me, in strict confidence, I can't really afford to spare the money just now. It will make me deuced short. I've worked like a nigger to pay like a prince; you can see for yourself that I am all used up."

"You certainly do not appear to be in a first-class condition. Who were the parties?"

"Oh, I couldn't tell you that, Frank, you know; the game was strictly on the quiet. We had one of the private card-rooms, and no one had the slightest suspicion that we were gambling on a great scale. But, to turn the conversation, what brings you over at this late hour? Something important, I presume."

"Yes, very important."

"So I imagined. Let me see! why, I haven't seen you since the day we met on the steamer dock when the girl was expected."

"That's a fact; I've been busy, and then there wasn't anything of any importance to communicate."

"Fire away!"

"Of course I have kept my eyes open, and thanks to the ingenious spy system that I devised I can overhear every word that is said whenever Mr. Lamardale has a conference with any one in his private office."

"That was a capital idea."

"Yes, and owing to it I have been as well informed how the search for the girl progresses as the banker himself."

"Well, has the search progressed at all—has any clew to the girl been discovered?"

"Yes, a clew has been found at last, not much of a one, but still if followed up it may amount to something. The girl was abducted from the deck of the steamer by a fellow in a boat, but why the outrage was performed no one has the slightest idea. He was chased around Sandy Hook, then in a storm the boat upset; the girl floated to shore, clinging to the mast, was taken to the house of a fisherman, but fled from there just before Mr. Lamardale arrived, and a diligent search has failed to discover where she went. That was two weeks ago. Lamardale returned to New York, but left agents on the ground who kept up the search and one of them stumbled upon the track, so immediately wired the banker. The girl, after leaving the house where she had been sheltered, went straight to a railway depot and took a train for New York."

"Aha!" cried Almayne, who had been listening with the deepest attention, "she is in the city, then?"

"There doesn't seem to be any doubt about it."

"But how strange that it should have taken two weeks to make this discovery."

"It is easily explained; the station-agent from whom she bought her ticket and inquired the way to the city, went on a vacation immediately after the train departed, and did not return till yesterday. There does not seem to be any doubt about the matter, for the man describes the girl to a hair; and then, too, he had a good reason for remembering her. When she came to pay for her ticket she had nothing but English money, and she explained that she had only been a few hours in the country. The agent was an accommodating fellow, and took the money; he was coming to the city and he knew he could get it changed so as to keep his accounts straight. This circumstance seems to fix the identity of the girl beyond a doubt."

"Yes, yes, certainly; the detective got upon the right track; but that was two weeks ago; what has become of the girl? How is it that if she is in the city no one has heard of her?"

"That is exactly what bothers Lamardale and his spies. The banker, Batterhofer, his lawyer, and a Mr. Blount, who was an officer on the steamer that brought the girl over, but who has left the service and taken a commission from Lamardale to find the girl, held a long consultation in Lamardale's sanctum this evening. Blount is the man who gained the information from the station-agent."

"He must be a persevering fellow to keep at it all this time," Almayne observed.

"From the conversation I gathered that he is greatly interested in the girl. He is the man that commanded the boat that gave chase to the abductor."

"I see; a case of love at first sight, I presume," observed the other, with a sneer.

"Well, it looks a little like it, but he has given up beat now, and he advised Mr. Lamardale to-night to employ some skilled New York detective, for he frankly confessed that he hadn't the least idea how to go to work to trace the girl in such a big city as New York."

"A sensible conclusion."

"So, by Batterhofer's advice, Lamardale to-morrow will put upon the track one of the best detectives in the country, and the lawyer says that if the girl is in the city the detective will surely find her."

"He must be a valuable man, this detective, for Batterhofer is a cautious old coon, and is never very ready to recommend any one."

"The detective is called Joe Phenix."

"Phenix?" and then Almayne filled his glass nearly full of brandy and swallowed it at a gulp without winking.

"By Jove! you must be a deuce of a fellow to be able to put away the brandy in that wholesale fashion!" Culpepper observed, in evident admiration.

"Oh, that's nothing; I served my apprenticeship abroad, you know, where the natives disdain to water their liquor. So this detective—how do you call him?"

"Phenix—Joe Phenix."

"An odd name, isn't it? And he is going to try his skill?"

"Yes; it is a very strange case. Lamardale managed the matter so that neither his, nor Batterhofer's name should be known to the girl; therefore, when she arrived in New York, she could not hunt either one of them up, but as she knew she was to be met by some one, you would think she would go to the steamer office and inquire about the matter, particularly, as she knew Mr. Blount to be a warm friend, and he had assured her that if she needed any assistance he would be glad to oblige her; at the steamer office, you know, she would be able to find out where he was."

"How do they know that the girl arrived in the city? Because she took the New York train is no proof that she continued in it until the city was reached."

"That idea occurred to Blount, who seems to be a sensible, long-headed fellow, and he followed the railroad clear from Branchport, where she took the train to New York, inquiring all along the line, but was not able to discover a clew to the girl, so it seems certain that she must have reached the city."

"The case excites my curiosity, although until the girl is found it does not matter to us. Her continued absence is our gain. By the way, about that will of Lamardale's—is it signed?"

"It is."

"Suppose the girl is never found, to whom all the money go?"

"He will make a codicil, giving a share to different charities, and providing a little more liberally for Cassandra and myself."

"Let us hope the girl will not be found then. You will be sure to keep me posted if anything new occurs?"

"Oh, yes."

Then the two indulged in a parting glass and Culpepper withdrew, leaving Almayne to brood over an idea that had entered his brain.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DEFIANCE.

THE chief of police sat in his office in a very unpleasant state of mind. Days had come and gone since Phenix had set out to hunt down the mysterious assassin, and the only word that had been received from him was the request to send out a general alarm to arrest the woman known as Guadalupe Barcelona.

This had been promptly done; four-and-twenty hours had elapsed, but not the slightest clew had been gained in regard to the woman, neither had Phenix been heard from.

As the superintendent meditated over the matter, inwardly heaping imprecations upon the head of the unknown villain, the mayor made his appearance.

"Lamardale has been after me again," he explained. "He regards it as an outrage that the murderer of his brother has not been discovered, and really, superintendent, it seems strange to me that your men cannot get upon the track of the right parties."

"Sit down," said the police official, placing a chair for his Honor, "and just take a look at this—you will see that neither I nor my men have been idle."

And as he spoke he gave Phenix's dispatch to the mayor.

"Aha! this looks like business," his Honor exclaimed, greatly gratified.

"Oh, yes; we're on the track now. It will take time, but in the long run I'll have the assassin."

"But this refers to a woman," the mayor remarked, after he had read the dispatch.

"Oh, yes."

"But you don't mean to say that the author of these mysterious murders is a woman?" exclaimed the amazed official. "It is not possible!"

"Oh! there's no doubt that the murderer is a man, but this party is evidently an accomplice. You know these rascals generally travel in gangs, and when one of the band is laid by the heels it usually results in the capture of the rest."

"Superintendent, you have really taken a load from my mind," the official exclaimed. "I had begun to think that your new man would not make any more headway at the job than the poor fellow who was killed; and in fact, chief, so great a respect have I for the skill and cunning of this murderous assassin that I should have been far more willing to bet that he would insnare the detective than that the detective would entrap him."

"It will take time, but we'll have him in the end," responded the superintendent, in an oracular manner.

The mayor withdrew, perfectly satisfied with the assurance, and the chief smiled sarcastically as the door closed behind him.

"He thinks that the race is all over but the shouting," he muttered—"and I wish to Heaven it was, but it isn't. No news, they say, is good news, but I never found it so in police matters. Not hearing from Phenix annoys me. I am afraid that he has come to a halt; the woman has succeeded in getting away, and that means that she must be smarter than lightning, or else Phenix would have had her dead to rights long ago."

At this point his messenger came in with the intelligence that a gentleman desired to see him for a few minutes upon important business.

The chief gave orders to admit him, and soon a tall, distinguished-looking old gentleman made his appearance. He wore his iron-gray hair quite long, had very shaggy eyebrows that overhung the orbs beneath, and his gray beard swept low upon his breast.

He was attired in complete black, and jeweled rings of great value adorned his fingers. In brief, he was a fine specimen of the old-time gentleman, and the superintendent, who was a good judge of men, set him down for a foreigner.

"Have I the honor of addressing the chief of police, sah?" asked the gentleman, with a courtly bow, and the instant he spoke, from the peculiar intonation, the superintendent guessed that he was a Southerner.

"Yes, sir; I hold that office."

"I came to see you, sah, upon important business; but before I enter upon it, may I ask if our interview will be strictly private? Is there any danger of our conversation being overheard?"

"Not the slightest, sir; you can speak with perfect freedom."

The stranger was evidently an oddity, and the idea flashed into the superintendent's head that he might be a crank, but the chief was a wary bird and always prepared for unpleasant visitors who might become dangerous. He was seated at his desk, facing the stranger, and in a pigeon-hole under the top of the desk, convenient to his hand, was a cocked and loaded revolver.

"I am glad, sah, that such is the case, for what I have to say must not be heard by any ears but our own. My name, sah, is Segare—Antoine Segare, and I am from Terrebonne, Louisiana."

The superintendent bowed. The peculiarity of the man's speech was now explained. He was a Creole, and spoke with the odd accent common to the Southron of the extreme South.

"See, sah; what do you make of this?" continued the stranger, and he took from his pocket a bit of polished steel and laid it upon the desk.

At the first glance the superintendent thought it was a piece of a broken knitting-needle, but when he took it up, and the light of the gas played upon its polished surface, he saw that it was larger in diameter and of far superior quality of steel to that used for knitting-needles. Then, too, it was blunt at one end, with signs of a fracture showing that it had been broken, and the other end was drawn to a point as keen as the edge of a razor.

And as the chief glanced inquiringly at the shining steel, turning it around in his fingers, an idea of what it was flashed suddenly into his mind.

It was the broken blade of a dagger, or, more correctly speaking, poniard—as the small, fancifully shaped daggers used by the southern races of Europe are termed, and by the means of just such a weapon all the victims of the mysterious assassin had come to their death.

The superintendent drew a long breath, and surveyed his visitor with a glance that betokened uncommon interest.

Was this the secret slayer come in person to beard him?

"Well, well, sah, what think you of that toy?" asked the man, apparently growing impatient at the chief's silence.

"It is the broken blade of a dagger, I presume?"

"Right. A pretty little instrument, a fragile thing, and yet in the hands of a master, who knows where to strike, it will find and sap the life as surely as the largest blade that the armorer ever forged."

"What is the idea of showing me this broken blade?"

"Can you not guess?" asked the other, in a theatrical sort of way.

"I'm not good at conundrums."

"It is the weapon of the slaver who always strikes to kill!" the Southerner declared, becoming still more dramatic and mysterious in manner.

"Is that so? I don't exactly understand—explain yourself."

"Now you begin to talk business. How much is it worth?"

"That depends entirely upon the information you are able to give."

"This blade, tiny as it is, took the life of your best man."

"Irving?"

The Southerner nodded.

"Now, my friend, since I perceive you know something about this matter, let me say to you that it is not a question of how much you can get for what information you may possess. You cannot drive a bargain with me after showing your hand in this manner. The possession of this bit of steel proves that you have a guilty knowledge of these outrageous crimes, and if you are not the principal you certainly must be an accomplice, and unless you make a clean breast of it right away, I shall be under the disagreeable necessity of at once locking you up."

"Then Phenix will be in danger," rejoined the man.

The chief started. Was it possible that the prince of detectives had fallen into a snare?

"What's that you say?" he cried.

"I say that if you lock me up, a man about the size of Joe Phenix will be seriously incriminated," responded the other, in an entirely different voice, and then he laughed.

The superintendent stared in surprise. Even his keen eyes and shrewd wits had been at fault.

Phenix himself stood before him.

"I wanted to try the effect of my get-up, chief," he explained, "and since it deceived you I reckon that it will pass muster anywhere."

Then the detective sat down and related to the police official all that had occurred and his plans for the future.

The consultation lasted until after twelve; the two left headquarters together, and as they came out into the silent street they noticed a policeman in full uniform lying in the gutter in front of the building.

They hastened to him.

The man was stone dead.

Actuated by a sudden thought, Phenix tore open his coat, vest and shirt, and there, on his breast, right over the heart, was the tiny wound which had stolen his life away.

Again the secret assassin had stricken a deadly blow, and, in bold defiance, selected one of the best captains in the force, and then left the body in front of the Police Headquarters.

It was a horrid mystery!

CHAPTER XXVII.

ANOTHER MISFORTUNE.

BLOUNT had been the sleuth-bound who had followed on the track of the girl until he obtained a clew to the way she had gone. But as we have seen, this clew could not be followed to any decided results.

The girl was traced to the train—she boarded it, bound for New York, and then disappeared as completely as though she had vanished into thin air.

Blount had hunted up the conductor who had charge of the train that morning, but that official could not remember anything about any such passenger as Miss Mardol, although, as he frankly owned, unless there was something unusual and striking about the lady's appearance, the chances were that he would not have noticed her enough to recall the fact that she was on the train, particularly after a lapse of time.

Diligent inquiry among the railway officials in Jersey City and New York produced no results, and at last Blount was forced to seek Mr. Lamardale and tell him that as far as he was concerned he could do no more, and then it was that the old lawyer advised the securing of the services of the experienced detective, Joe Phenix, but it took time to see Phenix, for he was busy upon another case, as the reader is aware, and it was not until almost two weeks after the disappearance of the girl that any arrangement was made with him.

And now we will trace the girl's footsteps after she escaped from the fisherman's house.

She had determined to try to get out as soon as possible, and after the old woman retired with the dishes in which the simple meal was served, she set to work.

She discovered where the water had found its way into the cellar, a broken barrel-stave, fortunately at hand, served as a tool, and it was not a hard matter to dig a hole under the edge of the house, through which she crawled to the open air.

Then she fled as rapidly as possible and, luckily, without attracting observation.

She walked straight on; in time came to a railroad track and followed it until she arrived at the depot, where she purchased a ticket for New York exactly as the depot master had described.

But in his statement to Blount, the station-agent had made a slight mistake, but a mistake which threw the searcher off the track.

It was in regard to the day and train that the girl had taken.

She had gone on an afternoon train on Tuesday and the man believed she had taken the first train on Wednesday.

Only a slight matter, apparently, and under ordinary circumstances it would not have made any difference, but this time it did.

The afternoon train ran off the track in crossing one of the numerous bridges that abound on the Long Branch Railway and the train crashed through the frail trestle-work into the muddy stream below.

It was a fearful disaster. Happily for the passengers the water was not deep; if it had been few of the three hundred odd travelers would have escaped to tell the tale.

But as it was, although assistance was near at hand, the people of the surrounding country flocking immediately to the aid of the sufferers, ten of the passengers were killed outright, while twenty were seriously injured, and among these unfortunate souls was our heroine.

She had been stunned by the shock, and when in a senseless condition taken out of the car, it was at first believed she was dead.

A careful examination disclosed the fact that life still remained, and although no wound appeared upon her delicate person, the doctors inclined to the belief that she had received serious internal injuries, and that her death was only a question of time.

Among the people who had hurried to the scene of the disaster, eager to be of assistance, was a middle-aged lady who had been riding in a handsome barouche across the road bridge over the stream, which was only a few hundred yards from the railway trestle, and had witnessed the train break through the structure.

She was deeply interested in the beautiful girl, and listened eagerly for the doctor's opinion.

"She is pretty badly hurt, I'm afraid, yet still there may be a chance for her recovery if she has immediate attention and careful nursing," was his statement.

"I'll take care of her and see that she does not want for anything," the lady exclaimed. "My carriage is yonder, and if you will have her conveyed to it, I will take her home immediately and send for my own family doctor."

The physician and the lady were well acquainted, and this offer took the doctor by surprise, for the lady was not one apt to be liberal in her ideas.

Really glad however that a "change of heart" had taken place, the doctor caused the senseless girl to be conveyed to the carriage, and the lady drove off.

Her house was only a few miles away, being situated in the Little Silver region, so-called from the small stream, the Little Silver River, which flows into the Shrewsbury. The lady was an odd character, one of the celebrities of the neighborhood, and deserves particular mention.

She belonged to the class popularly termed old maids, although in appearance she was far removed from the typical spinster, being tall and portly in person, with a really noble-looking face, although it was marred by a stern and haughty expression.

Miss Martha Brandon she was called, and she had resided in the neighborhood for nearly twenty years, being one of the first of the city people to improve the neighborhood by building a magnificent house.

She was wealthy, kept up a splendid establishment, and altogether was a person of great consequence in the vicinity.

She was respected and envied, but neither admired or loved, for she did not court the friendship of her neighbors, but was distant and haughty in the highest degree, inclined to misanthropy, too, and always bitter and sarcastic in her comments upon the world.

With a rod of iron she ruled her household, and, as a consequence, better trained servants were seldom seen. The madame, as she was usually termed, was despotic, and while she was careful to deal justly with all with whom she came in contact, woe betide the man or woman who attempted to get the better of her in any way. To avenge an affront of this kind she would pour out her money like water, and her neighbors who, like many of the cunning and grasping country folks, thought the city lady to be fair game, soon found to their sorrow that Miss Brandon was no one's fool, but, with her long purse and her vindictive temper, was a most terrible person to affront.

That such a woman should, of her own accord, offer to take into her palatial mansion the injured girl—a perfect stranger, and one who seemed likely to die upon her hands, was an event that astonished everybody in the neighborhood.

Lesbia had suffered severely, but her injuries were far from being fatal, although for a week she lay in a critical state, being strictly forbidden by the doctor to speak or exert herself in any way, and thus it was that the ubiquitous reporters, who flocked to the scene of the accident, like vultures to the banquet of blood, did not get her name and publish it in the list printed in all the daily journals of the sufferers by the calamity.

The madame watched over the girl with as much care as the most loving mother could give to an only daughter, and when at last the physician declared the critical moment had passed, and that there was no doubt of the girl's complete recovery, the joy that the mistress of the house felt could easily be seen. The stern lines of her haughty face softened, and a softer light shone in her brilliant dark eyes.

The doctor, who had been Miss Brandon's family physician for years, was amazed at the interest she took in the girl, for he felt sure that she was a total stranger, although the madame had never said a word about the matter in any way.

After completing his examination, as he rose to depart, he remarked to Lesbia:

"We will soon have you up; you have improved wonderfully in four-and-twenty hours. All that is needed now is time and careful nursing, and you need not be afraid to talk a little. Not too much, you know, not enough to excite yourself, and the moment you feel you are becoming tired you must stop immediately."

"I will be careful, sir," the girl replied, in her low, flute-like voice.

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that," Miss Brandon remarked, her imperious tones softening as she looked upon the helpless girl, "for a more obedient child than this poor girl was never seen."

Lesbia smiled gratefully, and the doctor could not refrain from a wondering look, for since he had been acquainted with the madame he had never known her to be so gracious.

Miss Brandon followed the doctor into the hall.

"She can converse now without any danger of it doing her an injury?"

"Yes, if she is careful not to overtax her strength."

"I'm glad of it, for I shall be able to find out something about her."

"She is a stranger to you, then, as I suspected?"

"Yes, a perfect stranger, and yet she seems as near and dear to me as if she was my own child. It's strange, isn't it? But then, you know, I'm an odd fish."

The doctor laughed and departed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LESBIA'S STORY.

AFTER the doctor's departure, Miss Brandon returned to the invalid's apartment.

"Now, my dear, thank goodness you will be able to say something besides yes and no," she exclaimed, as she drew an easy-chair up to the bedside and seated herself in it.

"It will be much more pleasant."

"And you have been very good, too; you have been perfectly resigned to hold your tongue for nearly two weeks, and yet the stupid men idiots are always protesting that it is an utter impossibility for a woman to refrain from talking," exclaimed the madame, with a sniff of contempt.

The invalid smiled at the earnestness of her hostess.

"And now that you are allowed to converse, you must satisfy my curiosity. I am a rather odd woman, I presume, everybody says that I am, and what everybody says must be true. I was riding over the road bridge when the railway accident occurred, and I reached the scene just in time to see you brought from the shattered car, more dead than alive. I don't know why it was, dear; I can't explain, even to myself; but something whispered to me that it was my duty to look after you, and as I am impulsive—too much so, sometimes, for my good—I yielded to the suggestion, and had you brought here. It was three days before you recovered the use of your senses, and when the reporters called to get your name for publication, I was unable to give them any satisfaction, and so in the report of the slaughter you were chronicled as an unknown. Doubtless your friends are puzzled to account for your absence."

"It is as I told you, madam, when you kindly offered to send word to my friends that I was safe."

"I remember; you said there wasn't any need of it—that there wasn't any one who would trouble themselves about your fate."

"It is the truth, madam; I could not explain more fully then, for the doctor positively prohibited me from saying a word more than was absolutely necessary."

"Very true."

"But now I can explain."

"Perhaps the explanation may not be a pleasant task," observed Miss Brandon, a sudden idea coming to her. "You must not think, child, that I am anxious to pry into your secrets. By some odd caprice I took a great interest in you as soon as I saw your face, and on the spur of the moment I determined that you should be well cared for, and if money could save your life it should be saved. As to who and what you were, I never gave the matter a thought."

"I haven't anything to conceal, and, really, very little to relate; the story of my life is plain and uneventful, although there is something of a mystery connected with it," the girl replied. "My name is Lesbia Mardol, and I was brought up in England, but I have an idea from some careless, unguarded expressions, that at various times the lady who had charge of me let fall, that I am an American by birth. My mother I never knew, and I was told she died when I was only two years old. I was brought up in a little country village, about fifty miles from London. My father, who was a strange,

silent man, always seeming oppressed by weighty cares, only came to see me at rare intervals. He was engaged in foreign commerce, I was told, and so was obliged to be abroad the greater part of the time. He was always kind and seemed greatly to enjoy his visits to me.

"There was some mystery about him, for the lady, who was a childless widow, and who had taken care of me ever since I was an infant, knew no more about him than I did, and after each visit that my father made she would question me in regard to him, saying how strange it was that he did not seem to have any relatives or friends, and when he went away never left any address by means of which a communication could reach him.

"The bills were always settled promptly, and I provided with everything such as befitted the daughter of a gentleman of fortune, my education in particular being most carefully looked after.

"Just two months ago my father came to pay his usual visit, and I noticed that a great change had taken place; he was but the shadow of his former self, and when in my girlish anxiety I questioned him, he said he had been ill for quite a time; so much so that he had been obliged to give up his business, and the doctors said unless he relinquished all care the worst might be expected. Within a week he was prostrate on a sick bed, and soon the physicians announced that his case was hopeless, and warned him to prepare for death at any moment. Then, realizing that the end was near, he told me he had written to friends in America, who would provide for me when he was taken away, which event soon took place. Ah! madam, it was a terrible affliction, for I had learned to love my father, and the blow fell upon me with horrible force."

Lesbia paused, emotion choking her utterance.

"Ah, yes; I can understand exactly how you felt, for I too have known what it is to have those near and dear to me torn away by the unrelenting hand of cruel fate."

And bending over the invalid, Miss Brandon pressed a soft kiss upon her forehead.

Thus encouraged, Lesbia conquered her emotion and proceeded with her story.

"A short time after my father's death, a letter arrived from New York, directed to me, and signed by a Mr. Edmund Miller, attorney-at-law. It contained an order for a ticket to America, and directed me how to proceed. It stated that I would be met by a gentleman when the steamer landed, who would look out for me until I could get something to do, as in the future I would have to depend upon my own exertions, as the person whom the writer represented—and who was evidently the one of whom my father spoke—was not so situated as to be able to be of much assistance to me at present. It was a cold, business letter, and it fairly chilled me when I read it. The lady, who had been as a second mother to me, was indignant at its tone and advised me not to go, but, since I was dependent upon myself for support, to remain in England with her, as she felt sure I would get along better than by going abroad among strangers."

"You thought that you were in duty bound to obey your father's wish though, and so you came."

"Yes, madam," and then Lesbia detailed the series of strange adventures which had befallen her since she arrived in New York Bay, and with which the reader is already familiar.

Miss Brandon was amazed.

"Well, upon my word! I never heard of anything more astonishing in all my life!" she exclaimed. "Why, it is perfectly outrageous, and to think, you poor girl, that it was your fate to encounter such perils. It really seems as if fortune had a spite against you."

"And yet, madam, I have never done anything in all my life to deserve it."

"No doubt about that," the other exclaimed. "I flatter myself that I am an excellent judge of human nature, and if you haven't a good and innocent face, then I never saw one. But now, my dear, if you will excuse the question, considering the interest that I take in you—when you get well what do you propose to do? Will you go to the office of the steamship company and endeavor to find out the whereabouts of this gentleman—this Mr. Miller?"

"I suppose so, madam—I suppose that is the only course open to me."

"Oh, no, you are wrong there; if you do not choose, you need not trouble the gentleman at all; you do not need any assistance from him. It is a very strange affair, and I must say there is something about it that I do not like. Why does the real party keep himself so carefully concealed? It looks to me as though your father labored under a misapprehension, when he intrusted you to the care of this person. He evidently thought that more would be done for you than simply paying your passage and then leaving you to look out for yourself. Lesbia, my dear, I am a very plain-spoken woman; early in life I met with a great disappointment, and it soured my temper; it made me hate all mankind. You are the first person to whom, for more than thirty years, my heart has at all

warmed. I did not believe it possible that there was a creature in the world for whom I would ever care two straws, but somehow your face softened my stubborn heart. I liked you at first, and now, since you have been here, that liking has grown into love. If Heaven had been kind to me, and man true, it is possible that I would now have had a daughter like you to cheer me in the old age which is gradually creeping upon me. Lesbia, my darling, will you not stay here and be like a daughter to me? I am a rich woman, amply able to take care of you, amply able to give you the luxuries which such a girl as you ought to have, your due by birth, I am sure.

"There is a vacant place in my heart—it has been there for many a long year, and I never dreamed that there was any one in this world that could fill it—but now that the sunshine of your presence falls across my life, the void has disappeared, and I feel as I have not felt for years."

There were tears in the eyes of both of them at this point, for Lesbia, too, had been strangely attracted toward her hostess.

"I will send a trusty messenger to find out all about this Mr. Miller, and when it is done, it will be an easy matter to ascertain who it is that is so anxious to conceal his identity. Then, child, if they can put forward a better claim to your love than I, you shall be free to go."

Lesbia's heart was so full that it was a difficult matter for her to express her thanks, and Miss Brandon quickly checked her when she made the attempt.

It was an odd occurrence, and, as the hostess said, the hand of Heaven seemed to be in it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN ODD ADVENTURE.

THIS last daring crime on the part of the secret assassin filled the heart of the superintendent with unbounded rage.

"The infernal scoundrel!" he cried. "He dares to defy our power! Phenix, this villain must be taken, no matter how much it costs or how great the toil, for if I can't capture him, the quicker I resign my office the better it will be for the city."

Phenix agreed with the chief that at all hazards the assassin must be hunted down.

Another point, too, the superintendent and the detective agreed upon and that was the annals of crime recorded no bolder or more remarkable rascal.

His bravado was wonderful. Instead of disposing secretly of the bodies of his victims as is the usual custom of all murderers, he seemed to take a fiendish delight in leaving them in the most public places that could be selected, and how such a thing could be done without discovery by the police was a circumstance that puzzled the old and experienced heads of our two worthies.

The bodies must be transported to the locality where they were found by means of some vehicle, but how they were removed from the carriage to the ground without exciting notice was a mystery.

Diligent inquiry revealed the fact that a close carriage of some description—the officer who had encountered it on the corner was not exactly sure of the class—had come through the street about ten minutes before the time that the two had discovered the body.

There wasn't anything remarkable about the vehicle—nothing to attract the attention of the policeman, and so he had not favored it with a second glance.

His impression was that the carriage was a common hack with dark horses, but as he was careful to state, he wasn't at all sure about this, and the carriage might have been a coupe, drawn by a single horse; of two things he felt positive though, the carriage was a close one and the animals—or animal—that drew it were dark in color.

This was a clue, although a faint one, and the chief proceeded to follow it up vigorously. He dispatched his keenest men to examine all the hacks in the city, and, by judicious "pumping," ascertain if any of the drivers knew aught of a coach which had passed through Mulberry street on a certain night at a certain hour.

Meanwhile, Phenix proceeded according to his own ideas, having arranged with the superintendent a mode of communication, so that each could reach the other at almost any time.

The detective was now satisfied that he had made a mistake in endeavoring to entrap the assassin in his own proper person, but since his present disguise had deceived such an old familiar acquaintance as the superintendent, he felt certain that no one else would be able to penetrate it.

His plan was a simple one; for the third time he was going to try the scheme which had already been twice successful.

Irving, in the disguise of a wealthy stranger, had attracted the attention of the assassin, and had fallen by his hand. He, Phenix, had also succeeded, although in his case, the woman, whom he had supposed in the Irving matter to be only a decoy, had apparently become the principal. He had escaped Irving's fate by a

lucky chance, and now, armed with the knowledge which he had so unexpectedly gained, if he could succeed in inducing the assassin to mark him out for a victim, he felt satisfied he could make a capture.

This time Phenix did not select the Fifth Avenue Hotel as a headquarters. After the narrow escape that the vampire-like slayer had had in connection with that hotel, he did not think it likely it would be as good ground for his operations as some other of the fashionable uptown hotels. So he resolved to favor the Brevoort house with his patronage.

A week went by; Phenix spent his money freely, cutting quite a dash, and supporting the character of a wealthy Creole sugar-planter from Southwestern Louisiana to the life, but never a bite did he have.

He was in constant communication with the chief and so was kept posted in regard to the search for the mysterious carriage.

The superintendent succeeded no better than the detective, and was obliged to come to the conclusion that the carriage was a private one; so, with all the force that he could muster, he was endeavoring to make as close an examination of the private carriages in the city as he had made of the public ones, a task not easily accomplished.

Phenix, on his part, since he had failed to attract his prey in the places which he had frequented, commenced to widen the scene of his operations.

"Possibly I have not paid attention enough to the nether side of New York life," he mused. "A Southern planter with plenty of money, visiting the city for the purpose of enjoying himself, would be certain to see all the sights, particularly the ones that are only to be found after dark. The secret slayer seeks men with money in their purses, ergo, then, I must take pains to let all the world know that I am rolling in wealth."

To those who dwell within the gates of Gotham, and are possessed of the necessary funds, it is not a difficult matter to find guides to the lairs wherein the "tiger" lurks, ready to prey upon all who are rash enough to dare his claws and teeth.

Phenix easily procured admission to all the high-toned gambling establishments, and in order to keep up his assumed character, he played with the reckless air of a man to whom money was no object.

For a week he kept this up, being nightly to be found at some one of the gilded gaming halls of the metropolis, and rarely returned to his hotel until three or four o'clock in the morning.

Numerous attempts were made by the well-dressed sharks, ever on the watch in such cities as New York for unsophisticated strangers, to obtrude themselves on the wealthy Creole, but Phenix, with his wonderful knowledge of the night-birds of the city, quickly perceived that they were mere vulgar rascals, and not the big game he sought.

Phenix, being a man of ice, never allowed the excitement of play to influence him in the least, and as is a general rule in this life, fortune smiled upon his game; the blind goddess being noted for favoring the indifferent souls who rather scorn than seek her smiles.

Luck favored him so much that the gaming-house keepers began to hate the very sight of his tall and handsome figure.

One particular night, the eighth one that Phenix had devoted to this quest, an odd incident occurred.

The detective about midnight had strolled into what was popularly called the "boss" gaming-house of the city, a palatial brown-stone mansion on Twenty-third street, where the largest "game" in the metropolis was played, and which admitted only within its walls the high-toned sports of the city.

Representative men, bankers, lawyers, politicians, and the young bloods, who possess more money than brains, lounged in the sumptuously-furnished parlors, discussing the topics of the day, or partook of the elaborate lunch which was served regularly at twelve o'clock, flanked with the finest wines and liquors, all free as air to the patrons of the house.

The Bon Ton Club the place was called, and those who were not in the secret supposed it to be a club-house, pure and simple, while in reality it was nothing but a regular gaming-hall.

This night Phenix was out of sorts. He began to feel annoyed that he had not succeeded in getting upon the trail of his prey, and the question arose in his mind if he had not better adopt some other plan than the one that he was pursuing.

He was engaged in mentally debating this subject when he sat down to play, and so for some little time he made his bets hap-hazard, paying little attention as to how the game was going.

There was a slender, dark faced young man on his right hand as he sat down, and Phenix noticed that he looked like a foreigner and was evidently deeply interested in the game, betting heavily, and, as the detective perceived in a short time, with decidedly bad luck.

The cards ran out, the board was cleared of the chips; a fresh pack, after being duly shuffled, was placed in the dealing-box, and again the

"Make your game, gentlemen," of the dealer was heard.

The dark young man put a hundred dollars' worth of chips on the king, and Phenix, in the jargon of the gamblers, "coppered" the king with fifty dollars' worth of chips to lose.

This action instantly excited the stranger. With flashing eyes and a voice hoarse with suppressed passion, yet modulating his tone so as not to excite the attention of any of the gamblers, he turned to Phenix and said:

"What do you mean by that? Do you desire to cast a spell of ill-luck upon me? Do you 'copper' the card with fifty to lose just because I bet a hundred that it would win?"

"Your action, sir, in betting upon the card had nothing in the world to do with mine. You think it will win—I think it will lose; that is all there is to it," Phenix replied, calmly, thinking the young man had allowed the excitement of the moment to get the better of his judgment.

"I have not won a stake since you came to the table, and you have bet against me in the most persistent manner. If the king loses there will be trouble between us!" the other cried.

CHAPTER XXX.

FORCED INTO A QUARREL.

THE superstition of gamblers is proverbial, and Phenix would have been inclined to laugh at the incident, if the face and tone of the young stranger had not betrayed how deeply earnest he was about the matter.

The detective had been playing with so little interest that he had not been conscious of betting in direct opposition to his neighbor, and nothing was further from his thoughts than the idea of so doing with any malicious purpose.

But now that his attention was aroused, he immediately discovered why the young man's anger had been excited.

His stack of chips were gone; the few ten-dollar checks which he had bet upon the king were all that he possessed, and Phenix remembered now that when he had taken his seat at the table there was quite a pile of checks, five or six hundred dollars' worth at the least, in front of his neighbor.

Fortune had frowned upon him, and with the usual inconsistency of man he was disposed to attribute his ill-luck to Phenix's presence.

With decided interest now the detective watched the game. He had got the idea into his head that the king would lose, just because the young man appeared to be so anxious that it should win.

Phenix was something of a fatalist, and he thought he had noticed that when a man gets into a streak of bad luck it generally lasts some time, and the more one struggles against it the worse it becomes.

This was the gambler's superstition over again. "No use to buck against the game when luck runs dead opposite!"

The king came out—a losing card—and the young man's chips went to "join the majority," on the dealer's side.

A stifled curse came from the stranger, but with the exception of the strange glitter in his dark eyes, and a curious way in which he compressed his lips, he betrayed no signs of the passion which was raging within his veins.

He touched Phenix on the shoulder and whispered in his ear:

"Will you have the kindness to come outside so that I can have the pleasure of a few minutes' conversation with you?"

The man's tone was calm—polite even, and yet Phenix detected that there was a world of menace in it.

"Certainly," he replied, for the detective was not the man to back out of a game of this sort when it was forced upon him. "Just wait until I cash in these checks."

"I'm in no hurry, sir," and the man cast an envious glance at the pile of checks before the detective as he spoke.

Phenix had commenced with twenty checks, worth five dollars apiece, and in the short time that he had been playing had won quite a little stack, so when he cashed them in, four hundred and eighty dollars were counted out to him in place of the one hundred he had originally invested.

"Quite a snug little sum for an hour's work," the detective murmured, as he stowed away the money in his pocket-book, "or an hour's amusement, rather," he added. "But if I had needed the money the odds are a thousand to one that I would not have been able to secure it, and that is the way the world goes."

While Phenix had been attending to this business, the stranger had gone to the elaborate sideboard, where the liquors were displayed, and helped himself to a small tumbler of brandy, which he drank raw with as much ease as though it were only water.

Down the stairs the two went, the young man leading the way, through the carefully-guarded portals—for there were three vigilant guards to pass before admittance could be gained to the club-room, and then out into the street.

It was a bright moonlight night, and the

street, thanks to the moon and the gas, was almost as light as by day.

When the pair gained the pavement the stranger turned and faced Phenix, anger appearing in every feature.

"I suppose you are aware, sir, that your cursed interference in my affairs has cost me a pretty penny to-night?" he cried.

"No, I am not aware of it," the detective replied, regarding the stranger curiously, for such men were a study to this human bloodhound, and then, now that he was taking the trouble to examine the features of the other closely, the idea came to him that he had seen just such a face before, but, for the life of him, he could not tell where, and this puzzled Phenix, for he prided himself, and with good reason, upon his excellent memory. It was seldom that a face once seen by him was ever forgotten, or the circumstances under which it was brought to his notice.

"Do you know what I have lost to-night in that infernal den?" and the speaker shook his clinched fist fiercely at the palatial mansion, that looked far more like the abode of a merchant prince than a gaming hell, within whose devouring maw hundreds of victims were sacrificed weekly.

"My dear sir, I do not take the slightest interest in the recital of your losses, so I trust you will have the kindness to refrain from inflicting the tale upon me," Phenix remarked, with cold indifference. "Only I will observe that a man who goes into a tiger's den of his own free will, with the idea of securing the teeth and claws of the animal that he may carry them away and exhibit them as trophies, has no right to grumble if the beast proves the victor in the struggle, and all he has to show for his pains are some ugly scratches. If you can't afford to lose you had no business to play, and if I was in the preaching line of business, I should remark that it is a great moral lesson for you, young man; got an sin no more!"

"You infernal scoundrel!" hissed the other between his firm-set teeth. "It is all your fault!"

"You are crazy, young man, and so I refrain from becoming angry at your abusive expressions, but I warn you that my patience has its limits, and if you do not keep a watch over that unruly tongue I may be forced to give you a lesson in manners."

"You give me a lesson?"

"Yes, my friend, teach you how to behave yourself."

"You are relying upon your superior physical gifts, or else you would not dare to threaten me."

"And you are relying upon the fact that your size protects you, or else you would never have dared to let your tongue wag as freely as it has," Phenix retorted. "If you were a man of my own weight and inches I would have pulled your nose the moment you dared to apply an abusive name to me."

"You would have pulled my nose!" cried the other, his face distorted with passion, and his hands clinched in a manner strongly indicative of war.

"Yes, sah, in two wags of a goat's tail! and I give you fair warning that if you should again forget yourself and affront me in that ungentlemanly way, despite my age, and the dignity which should attach to it, I shall immediately proceed to take some measures which may be decidedly unpleasant to you."

"Although I have the advantage of superior size and weight, yet you have youth as a counter-balance, but for all that I will try a dog-fall with you if you willfully provoke me to the encounter!"

Phenix was a marvelous actor, and this assumption of the manner of a dignified yet irate S. O. Berner was perfection.

The young man drew himself up proudly.

"I am a gentleman, sir, and I presume that you are also one."

"The man who doubts the truth of that statement, as far as I am concerned, sah, will get himself into trouble!"

"As we are both gentlemen, we must not descend to fist-cuffs, as if we were only a pair of cut-throats."

"Correct, sah; but when a man provokes me into a quarrel I am ready to meet him with any kind of weapons, from ten-pound rifle-cannons down to pop guns!"

"Stay a moment!" the young man exclaimed, haughtily. "It is not I who have provoked this quarrel, but you."

"Sah, you are entirely mistaken; I don't know anything about you—and have not the slightest desire to make your acquaintance. If you had got up from the table and gone away without saying anything to me I never would have known that you existed at all. But you are a donkey, sah; you have lost your money, and you wish to throw the blame upon some one else."

"Enough of this!" cried the young man, fierce in passion. "Are you man enough to make your words good—do you dare to meet me with suitable weapons?"

"Anything you like, my dear boy! Although I am not as young as I might be, yet I flatter

myself you will find me game to the backbone!"

"Can you handle a sword?"

"Try me and find out!" For mere sport Phenix was going to see the matter through.

"I give you fair warning that I am an expert swordsman. I was the best man of my class at Heidelberg, in Germany, when I was at college, and I have a pair of rapiers that I brought home with me when I returned; they are at your service."

"And I give you fair warning that I had as lief spit you on a German rapier as on any other weapon in the known world!" Phenix blustered.

"Come, then! I know where I can get a boat, and under the Weehawken cliffs we will not be disturbed!"

"Go ahead, sah!" the disguised detective responded.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON THE RIVER.

THIS odd adventure was just to Phenix's taste. He was annoyed at not being able to get on the track of the secret slayer and quite in the humor to relieve his mind by giving this rash and unfortunate gambler a lesson that would be apt to do him good.

In regard to the issue of the fight, the mind of the detective was perfectly easy.

In his youth he had lived in a German quarter of the city, and had been a member of one of the Turner associations so common in New York, and in the Turn Halle he had learned to use the sword, and at one time bore the reputation of being one of the most expert swordsmen in the city.

Nature had been singularly kind to him in bestowing gifts necessary to the fencer's art.

Long-armed and iron-muscled, a wrist as strong as steel, and yet as supple as the willow, coupled with most excellent judgment and a temper always even, so under all circumstances he was perfectly calm and self-possessed, it was no wonder that the old German fencing-masters declared that he was the very perfection of a swordsman.

Straight toward the river they went, stopping only once on the way to enable the young man to enter a small, old-fashioned brick house, where he said he lodged, and from which he speedily reappeared, bearing under his arm a pair of swords carefully wrapped in flannel cases, so that any one not posted in regard to them would never have been apt to suspect what they were.

"By the way," observed the young man, as they resumed their walk, "I presume, to be strictly in order, we should have seconds to witness our fight."

"That is a matter in regard to which I am perfectly indifferent," Phenix replied. "I had just as lief fight you without seconds as with."

"But what will the law say if there is a fatal issue to our quarrel?"

"That the man who survives is the murderer of the other, and whether we fight with seconds or without, it doesn't make the least difference; the law will hold it just the same. Daeling is forbidden, and the men who transgress the law must be prepared to take the consequences."

"But I am not afraid!" the young man exclaimed, in a tone of contempt, and, as he spoke, he cast a glance of withering hatred at his companion. "I am resolved to kill you, and if I knew that the executioner waited for me the moment afterward, I would not hesitate."

"Neither would I! That is my platform, sah, to a hair!" declared Phenix, determined not to be outdone by his fire-eating companion. "Although at the same time I reckon I shan't take the trouble to kill you, because you are young yet, and you ought to be allowed to live so as to outgrow some of your fool notions. When you get older you will know more."

The stranger glared at Phenix for a moment in a way that plainly showed he resented the plain speaking, but he disdained to answer, and so no further words were exchanged between them until they reached the street which ran parallel with the water.

Turning to the north, they went on for about a dozen blocks and then halted at a small "all-night" restaurant, whose sign declared "We never close."

"The man who runs this place keeps the boats also," the young man remarked. "He will not think it strange that I come at such a time as this for a craft, for often in the small hours of the night, when my brain burns with study, I take a pull on the river, and so keep myself from going mad."

Phenix took a good look at the speaker, and the reflection came to his mind that if he was not a trifle crazy now, he could not boast of any more sense than the law allows.

"It will only take a moment to get the oars and the key to unlock the padlock which fastens the boat," the young man continued, halting with his hand on the latch of the door.

"All right, sah, I will wait for you," the detective replied, still keeping up his ~~usual~~ character.

But when the door of the saloon closed behind

the other, Phenix began to seriously reflect upon the situation.

"This fellow is evidently a little cracked in the upper story, and I begin to believe that I have made a donkey of myself by being drawn into this quarrel," he murmured. "I thought the fellow was an impudent and an arrogant puppy, and was just in the right state of mind to vent my spleen upon him. I have had such deuced ill luck in this chase that my temper has really become soured, and I thought I might work off a little of my ill-humor on him, but the affair is getting serious. The fellow may be a better swordsman than I am, although I doubt it, and it would be the toughest kind of a joke if he should succeed in spitting me.

"And I don't want to kill the lunatic either, for by so doing I would get myself in a regular hole, but, hang me! if I don't see the affair through now that I have become mixed up in it."

The return of the dark-browed stranger with a pair of oars on his shoulder and a padlock-key in his hand put a stop to Phenix's cogitations.

Without a word he led the way across the street to the dock.

The moon afforded ample light.

By the side of the pier, which extended into the river, a flight of rude steps led to a landing raft to which a half-dozen small boats were fastened.

The stranger unlocked one and placing the oars in it, motioned Phenix to embark.

"The tide is making in, a strong flood, and it will be an easy task to reach our destination," he remarked. "I will take the oars, if you haven't any objection, for I presume I am better acquainted with the spot to which we are going than you."

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that, sah, for I don't know anything about it at all, but still it seems to me that it is hardly fair to allow you to exhaust yourself by rowing, while I remain perfectly fresh for the encounter."

"Do not trouble yourself in regard to that; my muscles are like iron and my sinews strong as steel; besides, if I did not tame the fire that burns within my veins by this slight exercise, I would be apt to kill you so quickly that there would not be any pleasure in the encounter."

And this opinion was delivered in such a matter-of-fact way that it caused even the old and experienced detective to draw a long breath, indicative of great amazement.

"Well, upon my life, young man, I really think you have more impudence than any fellow I ever encountered!" Phenix exclaimed. "But, somehow, you know, I've got an idea that this little affair may not turn out exactly as you expect. You may be Satan himself, but before you get through with me I reckon I will be able to convince you that I am a match for Lucifer and all his imps."

By this time the two were in the boat; the young man applied himself to the oars and a few strokes carried them out clear of the pier to the bosom of the stream.

As the rower had said, the tide was making in strong, and as the stranger was evidently a practiced oarsman, rowing a long and powerful stroke with seeming ease, to reach the Weehawken shore was not a difficult task.

"Now we shall soon see what we shall see," remarked the young man, sententiously. "But that reminds me: we have not yet made each other's acquaintance. Suppose we go through with the ceremony of an introduction? You have some worldly affairs, of course, to settle. All men have, particularly when they are of your age; your time on earth being limited, suppose you confide any important matters to me? I will faithfully attend to the trust when you are no more."

"Confound it, young man!" the detective exclaimed, really nettled by the assurance of the other, yet careful not to betray himself by departing in a single iota from the character that he had assumed, "you haven't got me dead and buried already, you know! Don't you think that you are rather previous in your remarks? You'll find out before we get through, I reckon, that you haven't got half so sure a thing as you think. And as for being any better acquainted than we are at this present moment, I will tell you, frankly that I don't care two cents who you are, and it isn't any of your business who I am, but don't fool yourself with the idea that my grave is ready, and all you have to do is to put me into it!"

"But it is ready; after I have slain you I shall cast your body into the river," the other replied, calmly. "This smooth tide, over whose glassy surface we are now gliding, will cover all traces, and when the waters in time give you up, you will go upon record as another stranger, found dead, killed by hands and means unknown."

A glance of fire shot from Phenix's eyes, and it was only by a strong effort that he retained his composure.

He suspected that the stranger was the mysterious assassin.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ENCOUNTER.

WHEN Phenix had first noticed the face of the young man, the impression had come to him that it was not unfamiliar, but he could not remember when or where he had seen it, but now, like a flash, the mystery was revealed.

The features bore a decided resemblance to the face of the woman who had so neatly entrapped him in the hotel, and who had declared that she was the mysterious murderer, a statement that Phenix did not believe, despite the circumstances under which it was made; that, tempted by the fact of his supposed helplessness, she would on that occasion have slain him, he nothing doubted, but that she had been the master-mind who had planned the horrid deeds and managed to baffle the keen-eyed bloodhounds of the law, was to his mind altogether incredible.

But now that he had discovered who it was the stranger resembled, he fancied he had a key to the mystery.

The woman who had entrapped him was a sister to this quarrelsome young man, and now too he understood why his antagonist had been so determined to force him into a personal encounter.

His device had succeeded; he had hoped when he assumed his disguise that he would be able to attract the attention of the secret slayer, and he was satisfied he had done so.

The stranger was the mysterious murderer—the vampire-like assassin—who seemed to kill as much for the pleasure of shedding blood as for the purpose of plundering his victims.

This time though he had apparently changed his tactics. Possibly he had come to the conclusion that the supposed Southerner was not the kind of a man who could be easily entrapped, and so had hit upon the device of a quarrel to make sure of his prey.

"He has the eyes of a fiend," Phenix murmured, communing with himself, as he narrowly watched the face of the oarsman. "But unless he is a far better swordsman than he is likely to turn out to be, I'll cook his goose for him."

Although it was years since Phenix had handled the foils in the Turn Halle, he was not at all rusty, for as fencing had always been a passion with him, during his trip to foreign lands he had engaged in friendly bouts with some of the best swordsmen of both Europe and Brazil, and so had at his fingers' ends the latest and most cunning tricks of the masters of "carte and tierce."

When they arrived within a couple of hundred yards of the Weehawken shore, the rower rested on his oars for a moment and allowed the boat to drift along with the tide, while he cast a glance around.

"Aha!" he ejaculated, in a satisfied tone, "I thought I could hit the spot without any trouble. It is famous ground that I seek, a spot just suited for such an affair as the one in which we are engaged. We will settle our quarrel in the exact place where Alexander Hamilton fell by the hand of Aaron Burr."

And Phenix, glancing at the shore, saw that his companion had conducted him to the locality where it was commonly believed the fatal duel between the rival statesmen had taken place.

"It doesn't make a picayune's difference to me, sah," the disguised detective replied. "I don't care a button who fought and who fell; all I want is about six square feet of level ground, and if I don't give you a dose that will last one while, then you are welcome to take my head for a football."

"If you have prayers to say, speak them before we cross swords, for you will not have a chance afterward," the other rejoined.

Then, with a few oar-strokes, he drove the boat to the shore.

Leaping out, he drew the bow up on the little stretch of beach, tucked the swords under his arm, and, clambering over the rocks, proceeded to where a narrow shelf of level land jutted out from the steep side of the Palisades, as the rocky formation that frowns upon the western bank of the placid Hudson is called.

Phenix followed, and as he cast his eyes around the thought came to him that never had he stood in a more lonesome place.

There were no signs of human habitation; nothing but the beetling rocks, the stunted vegetation and the restless current of the ever-moving river.

"It's a fair field, no favor, and may the best man win," Phenix muttered, as he clambered over the rocks. "He's a plucky imp of Satan to try this game, single-handed, but then he reckons that I am old, and as men in America go, it's about a thousand to one that I am not an expert with the sword. When I get the article in my fist, though, I'll bet a trifle he'll open his eyes."

When the level space was reached, the young man faced about, drew the swords from their covering, and in the ceremonious manner of the fencing-room, tendered them to Phenix.

A single glance revealed to the experienced eyes of the detective that there wasn't the least difference between the two weapons; a better pair of "slogger" blades, as the cut and thrust edge and point dueling tools of the German students are termed, Phenix had never seen.

Selecting one, the detective stepped back a couple of paces, and whirled the keen blade through the air, cutting a figure eight with as much ease as though it were but a toy.

His antagonist looked on with a scowl; being an expert swordsman himself, he detected from the manner in which Phenix handled the weapon that he had no mean antagonist to encounter.

"It was not a boast then; you do know something of the weapon," he observed.

"Do you suppose I would have been fool enough to have allowed myself to be bulled into coming with you if I didn't?" the detective retorted.

"But I will kill you for all that!" the other cried fiercely, advancing as he spoke and lunging straight at Phenix's breast, but the detective was on his guard, for like a wary swordsman, he had kept watch of his opponent's eyes, and from them received ample warning of the attack.

With the firmness of a rock, Phenix received the onset; there was a flash of steel in the air as he parried the thrust, and then, as the rashness of the attack had thrown his antagonist out of "distance," there was a quick straightening of the detective's supple arm, followed by a cry of rage from the stranger.

The point of the detective's steel had pierced his antagonist's shoulder.

"Not so very rusty after all, you perceive, my friend," Phenix remarked, as the other recoiled, gasping with rage. "Bahl! you are nothing but a bungler—you uncovered yourself at the first thrust! I might just as easily have sent my blade through your lungs and finished the affair at a single stroke as to prick you in the shoulder. You know enough of the sword to understand that, I presume."

"Well, why did you not do so?"

"Because I don't want to kill you; that isn't my game."

"No? What is it, then?"

"To make you a prisoner; carry you back to the city and introduce you to some gentlemen who are extremely anxious to make your acquaintance."

"Anxious to make my acquaintance? I am at a loss to comprehend your meaning."

"Why, it is as plain as the moon shining in the sky yonder. You laid a trap, and, as often happens in this uncertain life, was the first to get caught. It is the old story of the engineer hoist by his own petard."

Then, with a quick movement, Phenix removed his wig and beard and stood revealed in his own proper person.

An expression of the most intense amazement appeared upon the face of the stranger. Dropping the point of his sword to the ground, he stared like one transfixed with wonder.

Phenix was disappointed. This was not the expression that he had expected to produce.

"You are not an old man, then?" his antagonist remarked, wonderingly.

"Not much, and there is where your calculation was out of joint. You picked me up for a victim, but the supposed pigeon has turned into a hawk."

"I do not understand your meaning. Why should I select you for a victim—who are you, and what is the meaning of this singular disguise?"

The detective took a good look at his questioner before he made reply, and the thought came to him that if the other was the man he took him to be, then most certainly he was a complete master of the art of dissimulation.

"My name is Phenix—Joe Phenix; the detective."

"Ah! I can understand your being disguised, and I regret that I interfered with you; possibly I have disarranged your plans."

"Not at all; you are the man for whose express benefit I assumed my disguise."

"You are clearly laboring under some mistake," replied the other, incredulously.

"Oh, no, you are my mutton! So throw down your boasting-fork, and I will snap the bracelets on you," and Phenix drew from his pocket a pair of handcuffs, which he dangled in the air.

"You are crazy! What charge do you bring against me?"

"Murder!" replied Phenix, sternly.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DESPERATE STRUGGLE.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the young man, and the rocks gave back the shrill and rather discordant sound. "Murder! how absurd and how extremely like this situation to the climax of a soul-harrowing romance. I am the criminal hunted down, and you the expert detective—the bloodhound who has shadowed me to my doom. Ha! ha! ha!" and again he laughed.

Now Phenix felt sure that he was on the right track, for his quick ears detected that there was something false and unnatural about the merriment of the other.

"And you are going to put those pretty little ornaments upon my wrists, eh?" the unknown continued, this time in a bantering tone. "Going to carry me back in triumph to New York, and exhibit me as a specimen of your skill in

the detective line. But come; enough of this nonsense. Do you suppose that I will tamely submit to such an outrage?"

"You will be obliged to submit, for you can't help yourself," retorted the detective.

"Can't I?" cried the other scornfully. "Have you a warrant for my arrest?"

"No; it isn't necessary."

"Isn't it? Well, I can tell you that I will not yield myself a prisoner without you produce that little legal document."

"I can tell you that I am going to take you alive or dead, and I sha'n't trouble myself about any warrant either."

"You will not dare!"

"Oh! yes I will. You are my game. I have fairly run you to earth, and now I am not going to stand upon any ceremony."

"You are a better swordsman than I, and so I suppose you think there isn't any escape for me?"

"None; alive or dead, I'll hold you."

"Bah!" And with the utterance of the contemptuous exclamation, he flung his sword straight at Phenix's head, and then plucked from a secret pocket in the breast of his coat a revolver, evidently a self-cocker, for he discharged it immediately.

Crack! crack! crack! rung out the sharp reports on the still night air—three shots, fired point-blank at Phenix's breast as fast as the cylinder could revolve.

The detective was in a measure taken by surprise, for, although, from the expression in the eyes of the other, he had anticipated an attack, yet he had counted upon its being made with the sword, and the sudden production of the revolver was unexpected.

He was quick to follow the example of his antagonist, but before he could get his pistol out, the bullets of his foe took effect.

Each one of the three shots struck him. He staggered back and then fell upon his knees.

A yell of triumph came from the unknown. Taking deliberate aim at Phenix's head, he fired a fourth shot.

The detective fell over sideways.

Then satisfied that he had disabled his powerful antagonist, he approached with the idea of administering the final stroke.

But Phenix half rose, evidently badly hurt and partially stunned, yet sensible of what was going on, leveled his revolver and fired.

A cry of rage came from the other as the bullet tore through his flesh, and he recoiled before his determined foe.

Phenix staggered to his feet, the blood streaming from the wounds in his head, presenting a frightful sight.

"Dead or alive I'll hold you!" he gasped.

The young man answered with another shot which cut away a lock of hair from the detective's temple.

And then again the flash of flame came from the revolver of the man-hunter as he advanced with dogged resolution upon his prey.

Again the bullet had hit its mark.

The unknown had emptied his revolver, and so was weaponless.

With a yell of anger he threw the now useless weapon at the head of the detective.

The aim was good, and the missile tumbled Phenix over upon his back.

The young man sprung forward to improve the advantage, but as he came up to Phenix, the detective quickly raised his arm and sent another bullet into the person of his foe.

Again a yell of mingled rage and pain, and then, apparently panic-stricken, the unknown turned and fled toward the boat.

He was bleeding from the wounds that he had received, but evidently no one of them was severe enough to disable him.

By the time he was half-way to the boat the detective had managed to regain his feet, and opened fire on the retreating man, but his wounds had rendered his aim uncertain, and although the bullets whistled closer to the person of the fugitive than was agreeable to that gentleman, yet he managed to get into the boat and push off into the stream.

Phenix pursued him with grim determination.

One revolver being emptied of its charges, he drew another and kept up the fire, although growing so weak from his wounds that he could hardly stand.

The fugitive bent to his oars with all his strength.

"This man is a demon," he muttered between his firm-set teeth.

Shot after shot the desperate detective sent after the retreating boat. He had clambered to the top of a huge rock that jutted out into the water so as to secure a better aim, but venturing too far out, slipped upon the slimy surface, lost his balance and went headlong into the water.

The hunted man uttered a cry of joy upon perceiving this unexpected stroke of misfortune.

"Ah, you bloodthirsty sleuth-hound, that puts a stop to your target-practice for a time at least!"

And now the fugitive relaxed a little in his efforts, yet watching anxiously for the detective to reappear.

By his superhuman exertions he had managed to get well away from the shore, yet not too far to command a good view, although a great mass of fleecy clouds driving across the sky at times partially obscured the light of the moon.

Eagerly he watched—moments melted into minutes, yet he was not gratified by a sight of his foe.

"What does it mean?" he questioned. "Has the plunge into the river proved fatal to him? Ah! what a bit of good luck that would be for me! But I can hardly believe that such a thing can be possible. Wouldn't it be deuced odd, an accident should accomplish this difficult task after all my well-laid plans had failed?"

And then a fiendish idea came into his head, and he rested upon his oars while he mused upon it.

"It is barely possible that death can have ensued, for he did not seem to be badly hurt," he soliloquized. "He is as strong as a bull, and possesses the determination of a panther, and, like all members of the cat-tribe, he has nine lives. He is not dead, but probably stunned for the moment by the fall. The water will revive him, he will gain the land, and to-morrow follow again on my trail with more vigor than ever."

He set his teeth firmly together for a moment, and his hard drawn breath came from between them like the pantings of a wild animal exhausted by a prolonged chase.

"It is time to make an end of it now for good and all!" he exclaimed. "If he lives and continues the hunt, I am satisfied that my capture is only a question of time; in the end he is sure to run me down. Why then not make an end of it now? He is comparatively helpless. If there are any more charges in his revolvers, the chances are a hundred to one that the water has rendered them useless. I can return and put an end to him with as little ceremony as though he were but a calf in readiness for the butcher."

And having come to this conclusion, the unknown was prompt to act upon it.

He brought his boat around and rowed back to the point from whence he had started, by so doing of course bringing his back to the shore, but he was careful to glance over his shoulder every now and then for the purpose of noting if Phenix had arisen from the water.

But he was not gratified by a sight of the man-hunter.

He brought his boat alongside of the rock from which the detective had slipped into the water.

It was quite deep at that point, and the current was strong.

He would have been swept up-stream for some distance in such a strong flood tide as this," the searcher murmured. "I must look for him up the stream. By this time, unless he has received a mortal hurt, he must have risen to the surface, and if I do not succeed in finding him, then I ought to be easy in my mind about the matter, for it will be pretty conclusive evidence that he has found a grave in the restless waters."

Keeping the boat a short distance from the shore, he rowed slowly along up the river.

His quest was in vain; not a vestige of the detective could he discover.

Fully an hour he spent in the search, and then, satisfied that nothing could be gained by devoting more time to it, he headed his boat across the river to the New York shore.

"Phenix is dead, beyond a doubt," he mused, "but, oh! what wouldn't I give if I could only be sure of it! One look at his lifeless body would be worth a fortune!"

He feared the detective more than all the world besides.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A LITTLE OF THE PAST.

MISS BRANDON was as good as her word in regard to the promise that she had made to the girl who had come under her roof in so strange a manner.

She carefully wrote down all the facts appertaining to the case and then sent a message summoning a gentleman whose kind offices she desired to enlist in the matter.

This person was no other than Mr. Almayne. Miss Brandon had made his acquaintance some two years before the time of which we write, and there wasn't any one in the world for whom she had a higher respect.

In fact the regard that the pair had for each other once excited considerable gossip in the circle in which they moved, and the rumor had been widely circulated that it would result in a match despite the difference in their ages.

And gossip in this instance, was not so far out of the way, for the gentleman had been most decidedly impressed by the lady, and if it had depended upon him no doubt he would have become her lord and master.

But Miss Brandon, while frankly admitting that if she was twenty years younger her answer might be different, resolutely declined.

"No, no," she said, "I am in the sere and yellow leaf while you are merely on the threshold of manhood. Possibly the great difference in our ages may not be so apparent now, but

just wait until twenty years have gone by, then I shall be a decrepit old woman, tottering on the verge of the grave, while you will be in the very prime of life.

"Besides there has been one love in my life and the remembrance of the anguish that it caused me is still fresh in my memory."

"Remain my constant, faithful friend, and do not even dream of ever being aught else."

And this was the only relationship that existed between the two, all gossip to the contrary being utterly unfounded.

So when he was summoned the young man came at once.

When the situation was explained to him he accepted the commission.

"Certainly," he said, "I will give the matter instant attention."

Miss Brandon had merely said that there was a young lady under her care about whose friends there seemed to be some mystery, and she wished to have the matter investigated.

And now that the gentleman had accepted the commission, she produced the memoranda she had made.

"I have jotted down here all the facts in the case I have been able to ascertain," she said, giving him the paper. "It seems to be a mysterious affair, and I do not understand it at all, but I have no doubt you can ascertain all about it, although I fear it may be a troublesome task."

The gentleman gallantly protested that the more difficult the better he should like it, in order to give him an opportunity to prove how devoted he was to her interests.

"It may be necessary to employ detectives, but do not hesitate, no matter how much it costs."

"Oh, I should not allow any expense to stand in the way, even if you had not spoken in regard to the matter."

"Examine the memoranda, and see if I have given you all the necessary points; I do not think that I have neglected anything."

He opened the paper and perused it carefully, and the surprise he experienced was so great that it was with the utmost difficulty—despite the great command he had over himself—that he refrained from betraying it.

Miss Brandon's protégée was the girl who had so mysteriously disappeared, and who had succeeded in avoiding all search, although the banker paid out money as freely as so much water in the endeavor to discover her abiding-place.

"It's a strange affair," observed the lady, misunderstanding the expression upon the face of her guest.

"Yes, very strange, but I think I can easily ascertain all about the matter. It ought not to be difficult."

And then as he spoke to his mind came a strange suspicion. Might it not be possible that in some way his connection with the affair had been discovered?—was not this task which Miss Brandon had confided to him a shrewd device to ascertain exactly how he stood? It was improbable and yet not impossible. Culpepper had betrayed the banker to him; why might not the informer play the traitor again and betray him to the banker?

It was a wild idea, and yet so strangely was this wily schemer constituted that he allowed himself to give serious heed to it.

He did not believe that Miss Brandon was a party to any attempt to lead him into a trap, but thought she might be duped into playing the part of a tool.

His first idea was to ascertain if there had been any communication between the lady and the banker.

They were not acquainted as far as he knew.

"By the way, Miss Brandon," he remarked, after a moment's pause, during which he had been revolving these ideas in his head, "have you heard the latest gossip?"

"No, I have almost retired from society and so I hear very little."

"Ah, then I suppose I must make confession, but I thought you had heard something of it. Dame Rumor declares that before long my bachelor days will be over."

"Allow me to congratulate you then, if the report is correct," she said, in the kindest manner.

"I fear I must plead guilty to the soft impeachment."

"Who is the lady? Do I know her?"

"I am not certain as to that, although I think it is probable. She is a daughter of the banker, Redmond Lamardale."

A quick, convulsive breath came from the white lips of the lady; her face grew pallid and for a moment it seemed as if she were about to faint.

The gentleman sprung from his seat in alarm, but she waved him back.

"It is nothing—a sudden faintness, that is all," she murmured, speaking with great difficulty.

"Shall I not ring for your maid?" he inquired, perceiving that he had unwittingly caused the lady great mental pain.

"No, no, it is over now, but the shock was so sudden, so entirely unexpected, that for the moment all the painful past was recalled to me and

the old wound reopened. I have not heard that name for years."

"You are acquainted with the banker, then?" Almayne asked, perceiving that in endeavoring to clear up one mystery he had stumbled upon another.

"Yes, I was acquainted with him once, twenty years ago, and at his hands I suffered an injury from which I shall never recover while life remains."

The tone in which she spoke was full of bitterness, and it was plain that although years had elapsed the remembrance of her wrong was still fresh in her recollection.

"You really astound me, Miss Brandon!"

"No doubt, for I have always been as dumb as a marble woman as far as my wrongs were concerned, but now since I have betrayed myself and excited your curiosity, it is only right that I should gratify it. It is a brief and broken tale, with a mystery that even I have never been able to solve."

"Are you aware that Mr. Redmond Lamardale had a brother Robert?"

"No," answered the gentleman, "the only brother of whom I have any knowledge was called Rufus and resided in Texas."

"Yes, I knew that there was a Rufus Lamardale, and that he went south in quest of fortune when quite a boy; he was the second brother. Redmond was the eldest and Robert the youngest. Redmond and Robert were in business together twenty years ago and both of them suitors for my hand."

"I preferred the youngest, and I believed I loved him as sincerely as ever man was loved. Although the brothers were rivals it did not seem to breed strife between them."

"Redmond took his brother's success in a good-natured way, wished him all possible happiness and congratulated me upon my choice."

"I, believing him to be in earnest in what he said looked upon him as a noble-hearted brother. Little did I dream then that he was but a snake in the grass, and that all the time he was wishing me happiness he was secretly plotting to render me forever wretched."

"My wedding day was fixed, and on the very night before it Robert Lamardale disappeared. He left his house, ostensibly to visit me, and from that time was never seen by any one. He disappeared as utterly as though the grave had opened and swallowed him."

"I was nearly crazy; Redmond Lamardale pretended to be equally alarmed, but he did not deceive me, for even in my excited state I was acute enough to perceive that his alarm was not genuine."

"The most vigorous search was absolutely fruitless; not a single trace of Robert Lamardale, either alive or dead, could be discovered."

"Time passed on, and thinking that I had forgotten the vows I had sworn, Redmond Lamardale renewed his suit, only to be driven from my presence in anger, for I plainly told him that I suspected he had a hand in his brother's disappearance."

"All the defense he made was that Robert was unworthy my love, and it was a fortunate thing for me that the union had not taken place."

"Since that time I have never set eyes upon any of the Lamardale family. I have heard that Redmond has prospered and become a wealthy man, but mark my words, Mr. Almayne, if he is guilty of injuring his brother the truth will come out some day."

"I am glad that you have confided in me, for in my new relation to Mr. Lamardale I may be able to ascertain the truth, but I cannot believe that you are right in your surmise that he injured his brother in any way, although there is evidently a dark mystery connected with the affair, and I will not rest until I have solved it."

CHAPTER XXXV. THE MENDICANT.

AFTER a few more words of unimportant conversation, Lesbia was summoned and introduced to Mr. Almayne, and Miss Brandon who watched to see what impression her protégée would produce upon the gentleman, perceived that it was decidedly favorable, but she was puzzled by the girl's behavior, for never before had she seen Lesbia act so strangely, and she took occasion when they retired to robe for dinner to question her.

"Indeed, I cannot understand why it is that this gentleman's presence affects me so strangely," Lesbia replied. "He is a stranger to me; I have never met him before to my knowledge, and yet his face seems familiar and a feeling of alarm fills my breast all the time that I am in his presence."

"But why should you feel alarmed?" demanded Miss Brandon, amazed at this disclosure.

"I cannot explain that—there isn't the least reason why I should feel so, for he seems to be an agreeable, pleasant gentleman. The sentiment is one of those inexplicable things which cannot be explained. If I was inclined to be superstitious I should believe that in the future Mr. Almayne will prove to be my enemy and strive to work me harm and that the fear with

which he now inspires me is the warning of a subtle instinct latent in my nature."

Miss Brandon shook her head; she was completely puzzled. For Mr. Almayne she had the highest respect and she could not bring herself to believe that there was any foundation for the girl's suspicion, and this much she said to Lesbia.

"Oh, Miss Brandon!" the girl exclaimed, "do not think for an instant that I attach any importance to my foolish and baseless imaginings. I was only trying to account for them, that was all; but I was silly to speculate upon the matter. Why, one might as well try to soberly analyze a dream."

The hostess nodded her head as much as to say that this was her opinion also, but in reality she was much more troubled about the matter than she was willing to confess, for she was rather inclined to be superstitious, being quite apt to allow her instinct to sway her judgment, particularly in regard to new acquaintances.

Nothing more was said upon the subject, but when they met the gentleman at dinner, Miss Brandon was particular to notice all that passed.

Lesbia tried her utmost to appear pleasant and unconcerned, but, in spite of her endeavors, the hostess could perceive a weight of apprehension sat heavily upon her soul.

And once or twice, too, Miss Brandon fancied she detected that Almayne was also keeping a covert watch upon the girl, and this excited her suspicions.

"Can it be possible that these two are not strangers to each other?" she thought. "Can it be that they have met before and something unpleasant has passed between them?"

But the hostess was not willing to harbor this suspicion, for, so doing, it would imply that Lesbia had purposely deceived her, and so great was her trust in the girl that she would have been willing to stake her life upon the girl's truthfulness.

"If they have met, the knowledge has passed from the girl's memory."

To this conclusion came the hostess by the time the repast was finished, and they adjourned to the veranda to enjoy the balmy breeze blowing in from the ocean.

Hardly were they comfortably seated, when, through the gathering gloom of the dusky evening, an odd, strange figure came shambling up the walk from the front gate.

A genuine tramp if ever there was one.

Miss Brandon looked annoyed. Her establishment boasted a porter's lodge by the entrance-gate, and the servitor who occupied it had strict orders to keep out all such unsavory and unwelcome visitors.

"Where can John be?" the lady exclaimed. "It's strange that he did not perceive this wretched object."

The explanation was simple enough; the porter was at supper and too much engaged in the delights of the meal to pay any attention to the gate.

"The easiest way to get rid of the fellow will be to give him a trifle," Almayne suggested. "I will attend to it for you."

"Thank you; I suppose that will be the best way, but it is open to the objection that by such a course you encourage the man or his companions to come again," Miss Brandon remarked.

"I have an idea that these wretched wanderers have some means of communicating with each other. Some few years ago, when the tramp epidemic first broke out, I was in the habit of feeding all that came, for it seemed really sinful for one possessed of plenty, like myself, to deny these miserable, unfortunate souls the bread wherewith to sustain life, but they came upon me in such numbers that I was obliged to put a stop to it, and the moment I began to deny them, the pests began to lessen, until at last from eight to ten a day they diminished to two or three a week."

"No doubt they post each other when they discover a house hospitably inclined, but the quickest way to get rid of this animated bundle of rags will be to give him a dime and bid him depart at once."

Almayne's description was an apt one, for the man, who was a burly old fellow with straggling iron-gray hair and a scrubby beard, half-doubled up, evidently with rheumatism, was clothed in a suit so tattered that it really seemed wonderful that he was able to keep in it at all.

As he shambling up to the veranda, took off his hat and made a low bow, Almayne improved the opportunity to toss him a dime, saying:

"There's a dime for you, my good man; take yourself off now, and don't ever come and bother us again!"

"Faix! and who ax ye for ye dirty wee bit of silver?" cried the man, in a hoarse, rasping voice, which to the well-trained ears of the New Yorker indicated that the speaker had been in the habit of indulging in much more liquor than was good for him.

"Sorra a taste I want of it, do ye mind?" he continued, his tones plainly indicating that he was a son of the Emerald Isle.

"What do you want then?" asked Miss Brandon, sharply, having formed a decidedly bad opinion of the stranger.

"Is it ye that Miss Brandon?"

"That is my name."

"Long life to ye, m'sam! Shure, ye're the leddy that I want to see!" and he made another profound bow.

"Well, sir, you see me now; what do you want?"

"I'm tould ye're looking afther a foreman to wourk the farm for yees."

"No, sir, I do not require any one."

"Shure! I was tould ye wanted a foreman!" he exclaimed, in a dogged sort of way.

"I do not, sir, and I surely ought to know. I am satisfied with my present foreman and haven't any idea of changing," retorted Miss Brandon, annoyed at the persistence of the fellow, and feeling satisfied he had been drinking.

"Oh, well, I'm not proud, if ye don't be afther wanting a foreman I will wourk as a reg'lar hand; shure, I kin do anything. You can't have a likier b'ye about the place than meself!"

"I do not require any one at all, sir. In fact, I have too many hands now and am thinking of getting rid of some of them."

Miss Brandon wondered that Mr. Almayne did not interfere and send the fellow off, but the New Yorker, after examining the man closely for a few moments, had turned his attention to the distant sails upon the ocean as though the man was not worth troubling oneself about.

"Ah, a leddy like yerself can always make room for another man on sich an illigant place as this. Shure, miss, can't ye spake a wourd for me for ould acquaint'ship seeing that we kem over in the same ship?" he said, addressing Lesbia.

That young lady looked amazed for she did not remember ever seeing the man before.

"Ye disremember me, mebbe," he added.

"I certainly cannot recall you just now."

"Ye kem over in the City of Chester the same as meself!"

"Yes, I did come in that steamer but I do not remember meeting you on board of her."

"I was there to the fore, ye kin lav yer life on that. Shure! I kin call ye by name—it was Fardol or Dardol, or something like wan of them."

"My name is Mardol."

"That is! I knew I knew ye!" exclaimed the fellow, triumphantly.

"There's no place here for you, my man, and you had better retire," Miss Brandon remarked, sternly.

"Shure! I won't stay if yees don't want me to, and I'll take the wee bit of silver, more glory to yees," responded the man with an injured air, then he picked up the dime and shambling off.

"I don't like the looks of that fellow," Almayne remarked, abruptly, after the man had got out of earshot. "It seems to me that there is something wrong about him."

"He has evidently been drinking, but now he's gone, thank goodness!" Miss Brandon cried.

The conversation then turned to other subjects, and shortly afterward Mr. Almayne took his departure for the city.

Lesbia retired to her room that night with her mind full of strange fancies; but she gave little thought to the odd old Irishman, for although she did not remember him, yet she did not doubt that he spoke the truth in regard to crossing the ocean in the same steamer, but Mr. Almayne—why did that young gentleman affect her so strangely? Why was it when she thought of him that a presentiment of danger came upon her?

It was very strange.

She had been sitting by the open window meditating and now rose to prepare to retire. A glass of wine lemonade upon the table attracted her attention, and her grateful heart beat more quickly at this proof of her protector's thoughtfulness. "She is so kind," she murmured, as she drank the refreshing draught. But hardly had she drained the glass when a deathlike numbness seized upon her—she tottered forward, then sunk down senseless.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TRAMP'S FRIEND.

WHEN the tramp retreated from the Brandon mansion he shambling away, grumbling at a great rate, just as if he had been terribly disappointed in not getting a situation.

And he kept this up as far down the road as the people on the piazza could distinguish his figure. But after he turned the corner of the road—he quitted the main avenue and struck into a little cross-country path running through a small patch of woodland, when he came to it—his grumbling ceased, and he walked along at a much better gait than before.

After getting into the road he took particular care to be certain that he was not followed, as he evidently feared he would be.

He stopped to listen every now and then, and on one occasion—it was just after he entered upon the path—he took advantage of a clump of bushes to conceal himself for a good ten minutes, listening intently all the while, as though he expected that some one was following upon his track, and he hoped by this device to outwit them, as he most certainly would have done if there had been a spy upon his heels.

At the end of the ten minutes he gave utterance to an exclamation of satisfaction, and then, rising, resumed his onward career.

"In my suspicion that I might be followed," he remarked as he strode along, communing with himself after the fashion of many deep thinkers, "I did not take into consideration the fact that the chances were fully a hundred to one that there wasn't a spy handy who could be entrusted with the job on the spot, of the moment."

"And now that I have turned into this cow-path, it would require an Indian tracker to follow me."

All traces of the Irish brogue had disappeared, so it was plain that the man had been playing a part.

Fifteen minutes of brisk walking brought him into a narrow country road, and in a sheltered nook just off the road, amid a little cluster of trees, a well-dressed gentleman sat in a buggy, to which was attached a fine-looking horse.

Almost any of the men-about-town—the loungers of New York, would have been able to tell who the gentleman was, for he was one of the men of note at the metropolis—no other than the superintendent of police in person.

And it is extremely probable that it would have made the eyes of any of the metropolitan friends of the worthy officer open in wonder if they could have witnessed the extremely friendly way in which the "great gun" of the New York Police Department greeted the miserable-looking, old tramp.

Of course the intelligent reader, ever on the watch to penetrate the tricks of the author, has guessed the mystery long ere this.

The supposed tramp was a detective in disguise.

Such was the truth, and the detective was no less a man than our hero, bold Joe Phenix.

For such a quiet, sedate, and oftentimes saturnine person, the detective was very fond of a joke once in a while, and as he had successfully "fooled" the superintendent while disguised as the Southern planter, so now on this occasion happening just after he had assumed his tramp's disguise—to encounter the superintendent driving leisurely along the road—the chief had a country seat in the neighborhood—it occurred to the detective that it would be a fine chance to test the completeness of his new transformation.

So, as the superintendent of police came driving slowly along the road—the chief had been exercising his "trotter," and having pushed him at the top of his speed for a couple of miles, taking advantage of a bit of road as smooth and level as a race-track, he was now giving him breathing time—Phenix, confident in the completeness of his disguise, accosted him, and with the mixture of servility and impudence common to the men of the class he was representing, asked for alms.

The superintendent who rather enjoyed a joke, proceeded to "chaff" the supposed tramp, but Phenix sustained his character to the life, and finally became so impudent that the worthy chief of the New York police got angry, and seizing his horsewhip, threatened to jump from the buggy and give the other a thrashing which would be sure to teach the lesson that it is always better for a man to keep a civil tongue in his head.

And then, with a laugh, the detective revealed himself.

The superintendent, astounded, admitted that he was completely caught, and promised to "set up the wine" as a penalty, on the first convenient opportunity.

Then the detective informed the chief in regard to the business which had brought him into the neighborhood.

It was the Lesbia Mardol case.

In addition to the young man, James Blount, whom the retired merchant, Redmond Lamar-dale, had employed to discover the whereabouts of the missing girl, he had also invoked the aid of the police authorities, offering a rich reward for any intelligence of the absent one, begging, however, that the matter should be kept strictly private.

The superintendent, anxious to oblige such an eminent citizen, put some of his best men on the hunt, but they succeeded no better than the amateur detective, Blount.

Lesbia Mardol unquestionably was in Long Branch on a certain day, and took the train there to go to New York, but disappeared in some mysterious manner on the way, for, as far as could be discovered, she never reached the city.

At the Long Branch railroad station all trace of the girl ended, and not one of the eager searchers-after-knowledge, was able to strike it again.

Completely baffled, the detectives made their report to headquarters, and then, in this emergency, the superintendent thought of Phenix.

Our hero was summoned and asked if he would undertake the case, and he, always ready to oblige the superintendent, who had done him many a favor during the years when he was in the detective service of the city, readily consented.

He was put in possession of all the intelligence which had been gained by the searching detec-

tives, so there wasn't any necessity for any preliminary work, but he could take up the case where the others had ended—at the railway station at Long Branch, the last place where the girl was seen.

"I see, I see," observed the superintendent. "You are right at it as usual, old business from the word go."

"Well, what success?"

"The best in the world," answered the astute bloodhound in the calm and quiet way so characteristic of the man.

"The deuce you say!"

"I have found the girl."

"Phenix, you are a trump!"

"I am glad to find you possess so good an opinion of me," responded the man-hunter with a bow.

"You don't really mean to say that you have actually found this Lesbia Mardol, whose mysterious disappearance has puzzled the best men on the force?"

"That is my statement."

The chief consulted his watch.

"Why, you haven't been gone an hour!"

"The fate of a nation has been decided in less time."

After explaining to the superintendent the business which had brought him into the neighborhood, the chief naturally inquired as to how he was getting on, whereupon the detective replied:

"If you are not in a hurry, and have nothing particular to engage your attention this afternoon, drive down the road for an hour, then return and wait for me; I may have some news for you."

This was rather an "ambiguous giving out," but the superintendent, knowing his man, forbore to question him, feeling sure that in his own good time he would speak. So he was prepared to hear that Phenix had succeeded in "lifting the trail," as a westerner would say, but the announcement that he had actually succeeded in finding the girl was an astonishing bit of information.

"Phenix, you are at the top of the heap, and no mistake!" the chief exclaimed.

"Well, I always try to do my best."

"And you have actually found the girl?"

"Yes; not the least doubt about it."

"Give me the particulars."

"If you remember, chief, all traces of the girl were lost after she took the train at the Long Branch railway station, so at that point I commenced my inquiries, going in my own proper person, you understand."

"The ground having been all covered by your men it was an easy matter for me to go ahead."

"The station agent was eager and anxious to tell all he knew in regard to the matter, for the subject was still fresh in his memory."

"He was positive in regard to the fact that a lady, answering to the description of Lesbia Mardol, took the train for New York on a certain day."

"He sold her a ticket for the city and from his window saw her board the train; and then he added a bit of information, by way of showing me that he could not possibly be mistaken about the matter, which at once gave me a clew to the girl's mysterious disappearance."

"I should not be so certain about the date," he said, "but for the fact that it is fixed in my mind by the circumstance that the day on which I saw her was the day before the one on which the big accident occurred on our line when the up train for New York went into the 'draw' on the Little Silver Bridge."

"You heard of that smash-up of course."

"Now, superintendent, the moment he said that, a reasonable explanation of the mystery occurred to me."

"Of course, I see!" exclaimed the officer, unable to refrain from speaking, for his acute mind saw the clew at once.

The fellow had made a mistake about the date."

"Exactly."

"Not a doubt of it! Instead of taking the train the day before, it was on the day the accident occurred, and she took the train that went into the draw."

"The conclusion I came to, of course. She was on the train—was one of the victims—and that accounted for her mysterious disappearance."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HOT ON THE SCENT.

THE superintendent rubbed his hands gleefully together.

"Upon my word, Phenix, you are a regular bloodhound and no mistake!" he exclaimed.

"But I must say—without attempting of course to detract from your merits, or from the manner in which you have worked up this case—that it seems to me to be an extremely simple one, and the wonder is that it should have so completely puzzled my best men, for they all gave up beat, Phenix, and admitted that the job was too much for them, before I called upon you for your assistance."

"Well, it was one of those seemingly small matters, which sometimes amount to so much," the detective remarked. "The chances are that

the man never said a word to any of the other inquirers about the accident, and so the solution of the mystery did not come to them."

"But in the interval which elapsed between the first search and my appearance on the field of action the station agent had been turning the matter over in his mind."

"Probably, anxious to be sure that he hadn't made any mistake in the affair, for the depot-master seems a straight-forward sort of man, he asked himself the question, 'how do I know that it was on this particular day that the lady went to New York?'"

"Then the accident immediately rose in his mind and he said to himself, 'Oh, yes, I am sure of it, for it was the day before the accident

'You have hit it, I guess."

"Acting on the idea that the railroad accident was responsible for the girl's disappearance, I went to work on that theory."

"I got the newspapers which gave an account of the accident, but no Lesbia Mardol was among the killed, wounded or missing, nor any unknown girl answering to her description."

"The newspaper chaps, entering as they are, don't always get the full particulars," the superintendent remarked.

"They did not in this case, for Lesbia Mardol was on the train and slightly injured in the accident."

"In the neighborhood of Little Silver resides a wealthy maiden lady, Miss Martha Brandon by name."

"As near as I can learn, she was driving in the vicinity at the time of the accident, happened to see the girl when she was rescued from the wreck, and taking a sudden fancy, had her conveyed to her home in her carriage, and, I presume, that was the reason why the girl escaped the notice of the reporters."

"In Miss Brandon's house she has remained ever since."

"Isn't it rather strange that the girl should remain with this lady, instead of coming to New York?"

"No, not under the circumstances," the detective replied.

"You must remember that the girl was not received in a particularly agreeable manner upon her arrival in the New World."

"In fact, only by the merest accident in the world did she escape from a watery grave when she was abducted from the deck of the steamer by this fellow who appeared like a Frenchman."

"Then, too, remember, there was a mystery about her coming to this country."

"Yes, very true."

"She did not know to whom she was coming nor the object of the journey."

"Yes; and after such a reception as she received, it was natural that she should feel a little timid."

"Most assuredly!" assented the chief.

"Of course, she has explained all these circumstances to Miss Brandon, and, undoubtedly, that lady has advised her to remain in her mansion for the present—possibly has offered to have her lawyers look into the matter, and see why the girl has been brought to this country."

"In this disguise I visited the Brandon place, in order to see how the land lay."

"And you discovered the girl?"

"I did; she was on the piazza with Miss Brandon, and as she fitted the description to a hair, there isn't the least doubt in regard to her identity."

"Then, too, in the character of a traveling book-agent, I had previously pumped the servants, and from them learned of the presence of a girl in the house named Lesbia Mardol, who had been injured in the Little Silver smash-up."

"There was a chance, of course, that it might be some other girl by the same name—such things as that do happen once in a while, you know, strange as it may appear."

"Oh, yes, that is not uncommon," the other assented.

"But this girl is the one, and no mistake, and now comes the strangest part of my story."

"In searching for the girl I have discovered the man I want."

Then seeing the question written on the face of the superintendent, he continued:

"I mean the author of these mysterious crimes, whose bloody deeds have thrilled New York to its very center."

"Not this Vampire Bat fellow?" cried the superintendent, excitedly.

"That is the man I mean," responded Joe Phenix, as cool as an iceberg.

"Well, Phenix, upon my word, you are the prince of detectives. If you are correct and have treed your game—and being well aware of your caution, I feel certain that you wouldn't make the announcement if you didn't know what you were talking about—it will be an astonishing feather in your cap."

"I have spotted my man, chief; I hav'n't the least doubt about that, but I hav'n't got him dead to rights yet."

"I am well acquainted with the fellow, for I had a terrible tussle with him the other night when he was got up like a foreigner, and the scoundrel came within an ace of finishing the career upon this earth of yours truly."

"Egad, Joe, I really believe you have more lives than a cat!" the superintendent of police exclaimed in admiration.

"I've one life, I am sure of that, and I intend to hold on to it as long as I can."

"But I tell you, superintendent, this fellow is a regular devil of a man."

"He is not, physically, a match for me, but if he was I never should have escaped alive from the fight I had with him the other night; it was as close a shave as I ever had."

"And now another point."

"At Miss Brandon's house I have brought two trails together—the search for the girl and the pursuit of the mysterious assassin."

"Now the first task was not only to find the girl, but also to discover and punish her abductor if it was possible."

"Certainly."

"The presence of this man in Miss Brandon's house has put the idea into my head that he is the fellow who abducted the girl, and that it was her presence in the mansion which attracted him."

"That is a deuced bold theory of yours, but such strange things do happen sometimes," the superintendent remarked, musingly.

"I think I have hit upon the truth, but now the work is to get my man dead to rights."

"I cannot nail him and clap the bracelets upon his wrists upon mere surmise, you know."

"Of course you must have the proof, but now that you have discovered the tail of the rat, there isn't much doubt in my mind that you will be able to find some way to get him out of his hole."

"Well, I can try," Joe Phenix remarked with an air of grim determination which boded ill for the man whose trail he was about to follow.

"This disguise having served its purpose I shall change it for another, particularly as I have an idea that my gentleman suspected I was not what I seemed, and the moment I find out who and what he is I shall telegraph to New York and endeavor to locate him."

"I assume that New York is his headquarters of course."

"Undoubtedly! Well, you know I have given orders so that any service you need in the city, that the police can do for you, will be freely rendered."

"I am going to stay down here all this week; I presume that you with your opportunities for gaining information know where my cottage is as well as I do myself."

Phenix smilingly admitted that he was posted.

"I am convenient to the telegraph office, and as they understand there that my messages generally mean business, every time, they are very prompt in getting the dispatches to me, so if anything turns up making it necessary for you to communicate with me in person I can be quickly reached."

"I shall remember."

"Good luck go with you!"

"You may depend upon me trying to deserve it!"

Then the superintendant drove off and Phenix went on until he came to an isolated house, situated in a small grove.

This humble abode the detective entered, first being careful to examine the surroundings, so as to make sure that no suspicious character was in the neighborhood prepared to play the spy upon him.

This old house, being unoccupied, had been selected by the detective as a headquarters.

Within the house was a veteran detective, although a young man, Robert Plantington by name, in whom Joe Phenix placed great trust, and it was his custom when he needed an assistant to select this gentleman.

"What luck?" asked Plantington.

"The best that could be wished for."

And then he briefly related what had occurred.

"By Jove!" cried the detective in great glee, "the prospect is certainly an excellent one!"

"Yes, but I must play my cards with the greatest care or this fellow will give me the slip again, for he is as watchful as a fox."

"I am certain from the way he looked at me that he suspected I was a detective in disguise."

"A more cunning and wary fish than this fellow I never attempted to catch, and if I do not manage in the most careful manner I never will be able to land him."

It will be seen from this remark that the veteran man-catcher did not commit the common error made often by successful men, of underestimating his antagonist.

A half an hour later Joe Phenix quitted the cottage, but no one would have recognized in him now the miserable old tramp or merciless man-hunter.

He was a venerable old gentleman with iron-gray hair and beard, rather poorly dressed.

A good representation of the traveling agent, who journeys through the country, selling all sorts of little articles.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION.

THE "horse doctor gaz" was the "lay" the acute detective was on this time.

That is, he pretended he was a traveling horse-doctor.

Was provided with a little book treating of horses and their ailments, got up by the proprietor of a horse medicine for free distribution to advertise his compound.

But in order to deceive the guileless countrymen, and lead them to believe that they were getting something for nothing, and so induce them to more highly prize the pamphlet, a price, twenty-five cents, was printed upon the cover in prominent letters.

Joe Phenix had secured a number of the books, and to go around the country in various disguises offering the books for sale and pretending to be a traveling horse-doctor was a favorite device of his when the work in hand required a spy.

In such a guise he was sure of a respectful hearing from all grooms and stablemen, and as he was an excellent judge of a horse and able to really give good advice in case of sickness, he found no difficulty in playing the role to the life, and often in this manner secured important information.

Stablemen are prone to gossip, and when Phenix in this disguise got into a stable, he was certain of being able to put in an hour or so there, for after explaining his business it was the easiest matter in the world for him to get into a conversation with the men in regard to the "stock."

Then the races were to be discussed; Phenix always made it a point to be posted in regard to what was going on in this line, and being an admirer of the sport, was able to give the latest news, and the correct "tips" as to which would be the lucky horses to first reach the post in the important races near at hand were freely given by him.

Of course a "gent" possessed of such important information was always entertained in the most cordial manner, and in return the hosts were glad to gossip in regard to affairs in their own immediate neighborhood, and so, usually, the detective had no difficulty in gaining the information of which he was in search.

And on this present occasion the stablemen attached to the Brandon place made him welcome in the most hospitable manner.

There were two of them, both colored, one well in years, the coachman; the other, a young man, the hostler.

It was beginning to get dark when Phenix sauntered up to the stable and engaged the two men in conversation.

The pair were sitting in the stable door smoking their pipes.

A lantern, suspended from a wire running up and down the apartment in the rear of the horse-stalls, illuminated the scene.

When Phenix explained his business and produced his books, the negroes, with the usual disposition of their race to talk, were immediately interested.

For a good half-hour the detective did his best to make a favorable impression upon the pair, and succeeded in a perfectly satisfactory manner, both of the colored men becoming impressed with the belief that their visitor was one of the most entertaining and knowing of men.

Then, being convinced that his hosts would be glad to give him any information in their power, Phenix turned the conversation by remarking that there was some good "stock" in the stable.

There were six horses in the place, two of them handsome dapple grays, evidently a pair of coach-horses—and a splendid team too, worth at least twelve hundred dollars of any man's money, then a pair of chestnuts, no such handsome horses as the others, but, as the keen eyes of the experienced horseman immediately detected, a far better pair, a team capable of doing work which the showy, big-boned grays would never be able to go through.

In addition, there was a high-headed, long-necked "cob," plainly a *coupe* horse, and a fat pony, suitable for a village-cart or phaeton.

It immediately struck the detective that it was strange a lady like Miss Brandon should keep two pair of carriage-horses besides the other single horses, and so he spoke in reference to the teams:

"That is a fine pair of dapple grays you have there," he said.

"Deed dey are, sah!" responded the coachman with conscious pride, and the hostler echoed the exclamation.

"Dat's as fine a pair of hosses as you will find along de beach, sah, cl'ar from Seabright down to Ocean Grove," the coachman continued.

"I done know w'at I am talkin' 'bout, sah, for I've driv' dem hosses along Ocean avenue wid de best of dem."

"Yes, anybody can see that they are good 'uns," remarked the disguised detective, surveying the beasts with the eyes of a critic and nodding his head with a wonderful air of wisdom.

"That other pair are not bad beasts, either, although they look more like trotters than carriage horses."

And as he spoke, Phenix turned his attention to the chestnuts.

"Deed you are right dar, sah," the coachman said.

"No, kerriage hosses 'bout dem; jist a pa'r of trotters. Dey are big enuff an' have got plenty of go in dem, but no style, sah, like de odders."

"Not fit, sah, in my opinion, for to put before de kerriage of a furst-class lady or gemman."

"Dey don't belong to us, sah," added the hostler, anxious to take part in the conversation.

"No?"

"No, sah; dey belong to a New York gemman—a high-toned reester, sah, dough I would-n't give much for sich stock as dat for to use before a kerriage," the coachman remarked, with an air of owl-like gravity.

"Mister Almayne is w'at dey calls him, I b'lieve," the hostler remarked, determined that his companion should not deliver all the information.

"I think I have heard of him—lives up-town?" Phenix remarked, eager now on the scent, although so careful a guard he had over himself that no one would ever have suspected he took any particular interest in the matter.

He had a suspicion that "Mister" Almayne was the game he was in search of.

"Yes, sah, dat's his name; mighty queer one, too, 'cos de odder is something like Basil; but dere is more to it."

"I say, Jim, 'most all de bloods call him Doc Almayne, don't dey?" the hostler asked.

"I reckon dey does—leastways, dat is w'at I've heard."

"Visiting at the house, I suppose," observed Phenix, carelessly.

"Well, he's up dar now," the coachman replied, "but he ain't but jist done come."

"De mos' foolish trick I ebber heard of. Dat man, sah, brought his coach and bosses all de way from de city, wid a driver—a low-down, triffin' white man, I'm thinkin', 'kase you can't git two words out ob him wid de mos' civil question—and now de gemman allows dat he will drive all de way back to de city to-night."

"Yes, sah, and gib me a quarter for to see dat de hosses had a good feed ob oats, so as to brace 'em up for de trip!" the hostler added.

"Did he drive down?" asked the disguised detective, who began to suspect he had got hold of the tail of a particularly large-sized rat here.

"No, sah; come by de Long Branch beat."

"Going to drive back by way of Keyport and Staten Island, I presume?"

"No, sah, he can't make it dat way, 'cos de ferryboat 'tween South Amboy an' Perth Amboy is drawn off, and darfore he will hab to go by de way of New Brunswick."

"Yes, yes, I see."

And now having gained all the information he desired, the disguised detective brought his call to a close and took his departure.

Back again to his headquarters he hurried as fast as possible.

"Bob, you must start for New York immediately," Joe Phenix cried, the moment he entered the old house.

"Our man is here with a coach, and has given out that he intends to start to-night with the intention of driving to New York."

"It is a 'plant,' as sure as you are born! His little game is to kidnap this girl again, and if I don't work the trick so it will end in my putting the bracelets on his wrists, then I am not as good a man as I believe!"

"How will you work it—catch him in the act?"

"Oh, no, I wan't to build on surer foundation than that."

"Kidnapping isn't enough to satisfy me. I want to take him right in his den; get him so dead to rights that all the salt in the world won't save him."

"His name is Almayne, and his first name is something like Basil, only longer, but in New York, among the bloods, he is known as Doc Almayne."

"Your task is to discover his house and put a watch upon it, but in such a way that it cannot be detected, for if it was discovered that we have spotted him, all the fat would be in the fire."

"My game is to let him abduct the girl and get off with her."

"The trick will not be worked until late, in all probability."

"I will be on the watch, and will provide myself with one of the racers, as good a running horse as I can pick up, and there's plenty of cracks over to Monmouth race-course, you know."

"I will have the horse's hoofs muffled so that I will be able to follow this fellow without his being aware that a spy is on his track."

"If he heads for New York it will look as if he was making for his den, and if he goes in any other direction it will not be possible for him to shake me off."

"If I have a chance I will telegraph you after we start."

"When you reach New York you had better see Inspector Byrnes, who is acting in the absence of the superintendent; or, better still, I will see the superintendent, get the racer through him, and ask him to go to New York so as to spring the trap on the rascal in person."

With such detectives as these to plan was to act.

Ten minutes later Plantington was on his way to New York, and Phenix, hurrying to the cottage of the superintendent of police.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WEAVING THE WEB.

JOE PHENIX was a fast walker, and it did not take him long to reach the summer cottage "on the beach at Long Branch," occupied by the superintendent of police.

The New York chief dined late, after the fashion common to the notables of the neighborhood, and was sitting on the piazza, enjoying a cigar, in company with his family, when the detective came up.

As Phenix advanced toward the house the chief surveyed him with a curious glance, for though the detective was so carefully disguised that the superintendent did not recognize him, yet the idea came to him that he had seen the stranger somewhere before.

The cottage of the superintendent was situated next to one of the big hotels, and the electric lights which flared in front of the palace-like structure flooded the cottage lawn with light, so that all objects were almost as visible as in the full glare of the sunlight.

By the time that Phenix had got half-way across the lawn the New York official penetrated his disguise.

Or, to speak more correctly, he suspected that the stranger was the detective, for knowing that he was in the neighborhood, and expecting a call from him, he was on the watch, otherwise it is safe to say that he would not have recognized Phenix, so complete was his disguise.

The moment he made the discovery the superintendent rose to his feet and, with a casual remark to the effect that he supposed he had better see what the old fellow wanted, advanced to meet Phenix.

It was a rule of the chief of the metropolitan police never to allow his family to know aught of his business.

Unlike other men he could not confine his business strictly to his office, for in urgent cases it was absolutely necessary for his secret agents to seek him at his residence, when he was not at Headquarters, no matter what the hour might be.

When the disguised detective perceived that the official was coming to meet him he halted.

The superintendent came up, favored Phenix with a scrutinizing glance and said:

"Well, I think I know you this time, although if I had not been on the lookout for you the odds are big that you would have fooled me again."

"Is my disguise so perfect, then?" the detective asked with a quiet smile.

"Indeed it is!" the chief exclaimed. "You are at the top of the heap in this line, and no mistake!"

"Such a compliment as that from a man like yourself, an expert in these matters, is worth having."

"It is my honest opinion, too—no gum-game about the matter, you know; but what is up?"

"Any more news?"

"Oh, yes—important, too."

"Come 'round with me to the back of the house; we shall be in the shadow there, and can converse without any danger of attracting observation; for in a place like this, you know, you never can tell who may be in the neighborhood."

Phenix nodded, for in his judgment the move was a good one, and then the two proceeded to the rear of the cottage.

There was a garden bench there, in the shade of a good-sized tree, between the cottage and the barn, which was a hundred feet or so from the house, and upon this bench the two seated themselves.

It was a capital spot for a confidential conversation, for all around the tree was an open space, so there wasn't any chance for an eaves-dropper to play the spy.

In terse language the detective revealed the important discoveries which he had made, and the suspicions he had in regard to the designs of "Doc" Almayne.

"You have come pretty near to the truth, I think!" the superintendent exclaimed, when the detective had finished.

"Your idea that this fellow had something to do with the abduction of the girl, although seemingly an extremely wild guess, is not far out of the way; and as he succeeded in carrying the girl off once, the chances are big that he may try the game again."

"That is the conclusion I came to immediately," Phenix remarked.

"And acting on the idea, I have taken measures to get my man so dead to rights that there will not be a chance for him to escape when the time comes to spring the trap on him."

And then the detective related how he had dispatched his assistant to New York, and also explained what his own plans were.

"Excellent! excellent!" exclaimed the superintendent.

"I don't see how your plan can be bettered in any way, and I will do all I can to aid you."

"I will telegraph to Byrnes in New York that Plankington is on an important scent, and for him to furnish any aid he may require; and in regard to the running horse, General Tom Mack, who has a stock-farm near Monmouth Park, in Eatontown, where he boards and trains twenty or thirty racers every year, is a particular friend of mine, and from him I can undoubtedly get an animal such as you want."

"And if he hasn't got a horse, he can put me in the way to get one."

"We will drive over there at once, for in this matter there isn't any time to be lost."

"You wait here while I order my trotter to be harnessed."

The superintendent's stableman was indulging in a smoke in front of the barn, so that the command to harness the horse was immediately obeyed.

"Do you think there is any danger of your being recognized by any one if you go with me in the buggy?" the chief asked, when he returned to Phenix.

"We will only have to go to the corner on Ocean avenue, and after we turn into the side street, and get away from the glare of the hotel lights, there isn't much chance of your being spotted by any one even if you were not disguised."

"Oh, I will risk it," Phenix replied.

"We are quite a distance away from the field of action, and it is not likely that the fellow has his spies here at the Branch, because he will not be apt to suspect that any one could penetrate his designs."

"Well, if you thought there was danger, I was going to suggest you could walk up the side street and get into the buggy there."

"No necessity for that, I think."

"I don't hardly think there is, but I am so deuced anxious for you to lay this scoundrel by the heels, that I am really nervous about the matter."

"You can depend upon it that I will not neglect any precautions."

The appearance of the stableman at this point with the buggy interrupted the conversation.

The two entered the vehicle and away they went.

As the superintendent had remarked, it did not take them many minutes to get out of the glare of the lights on Ocean avenue—Long Branch's famous drive—to the gloom and quiet of the country road.

And there the conversation was resumed.

"This Almayne is accompanied by a coachman," the detective said, "and Miss Brandon's men, who are two unusually sensible and well-informed darkies, are not at all favorably impressed with him."

"To use their language, he is a 'low-down, trifling' sort of fellow, who is not disposed to be sociable."

"Some cross cove who is doing the coachman act for his pal, and who is afraid to talk with the stableman for fear they will discover that he is not what he appears to be," the superintendent remarked.

"Yes, that is my idea exactly, and that is the reason why I did not attempt to interview him."

"I was afraid I should discover that he was some old acquaintance, and feared he might be sharp enough to penetrate my disguise, and if he did all the fat would be in the fire."

"Not a doubt about that," the chief observed, with a sagacious nod.

"It is as plain as the nose on a man's face that if this master scoundrel discovered that Joe Phenix was nosing around with the idea of having a finger in the pie he would certainly be scared off."

"Yes, and that is just exactly what I do not want, for if he manages to get away this time it may be a long while before I have a chance to get on his track again."

"My idea is to let him go on and then take him, red-handed, in his den."

"I want to catch him in such a way that the evidence will be so strong that there will not be the least chance in the world for him to escape."

"That's the talk—that is the way to do the trick!" the chief exclaimed, decidedly.

"There isn't any use of nailing a man unless you've got him so dead to rights that he can't get out of it."

Phenix nodded approvingly, for this was the game he always played.

CHAPTER XL.

IN THE SADDLE.

As the horse of the superintendent of police was a most excellent animal it did not take the pair long to reach the well-known stock farms of General Tom Mack which was situated on the outskirts of the pretty village of Eatontown, near the famous Monmouth Park, Long Branch's justly celebrated race-track.

Luck seemed disposed to favor the blood-hound of the law in the difficult game which he had undertaken to play for the proprietor of the stock-farm was at home.

The metropolitan superintendent, knowing the general to be a discreet, long-headed man, had judged that it would be best to partially let

him into the secret, and so explained to him that the horse was wanted for a bit of detective business, but without going into any particulars.

He had said as much to Joe Phenix, and that gentleman had agreed with the chief.

"Yes, there isn't much danger of anything leaking out, for these horsemen are always keen chaps and understand that a still tongue often makes a wise head, and then too if he knows for what purpose the horse is wanted, we will be more apt to get one suited to the trip, than if he picked a steed out in ignorance of the purpose for which it was to be used," the detective observed, shrewdly.

So, after the chief had introduced Joe Phenix to the general, stating that he was a gentleman in the detective line, he at once proceeded to explain why they had called upon him.

"You want a good horse for a little detective business, eh?" the general remarked, thoughtfully. "Stout, and speedy, an all-day horse, able to do his sixty miles without going all to pieces?"

"That is the kind of horse, exactly," said the superintendent.

"I guess I can fit you out all right."

"There is just the kind of animal you want in my stables."

"Old Hickory, as good a beast as ever looked through a bridle, if he wasn't such a rogue."

"Why, I know Old Hickory!" exclaimed the chief of police.

"I have seen him run—and win, too—right here, on the Monmouth course."

"Exactly! he has done it—he has showed the way to the judges' stand to the best of them."

"And if he would only run always as he can run when he feels like it, he would be worth twenty or thirty thousand dollars of any one's money."

"But as it is, the man who would be idiot enough to pay one thousand for him would be apt to regret his foolishness mightily before he was a year older."

"One racing campaign would be apt to make him wish he had thrown his money into the sea rather than invested it in the horse."

"I understand," observed the superintendent with a sagacious nod, "he is uncertain and unreliable about his running."

"That is the explanation."

"Here on our private track he can beat any horse that we have ever had on the place, but when it comes to a public race, in just about nine times out of ten the brute will not try to run at all."

"Once in a while, one time out of ten, as I said, he will go ahead and beat his horses with ease, and then the next day he will allow some of the same horses to run away from him in the most hollow manner."

"I tell you what it is, gentlemen, such a horse is a mighty disagreeable bit of property to own, for after winning a race the public come in and back him the next time he starts, and then, when they see the horse beaten so ridiculously easy, they are apt to set up a howl that the horse was pulled—he was not ridden to win, and that I, the owner, am an 'infernal skin,' who is robbing the public of their money."

"Mighty disagreeable, of course," the superintendent observed.

"Oh, yes, it isn't pleasant to be called a cheat and a robber right to your teeth, too, on a crowded race-track, as I was once on account of this beast of a horse, who can run and will not, and the brute carried ten thousand dollars of my cash that day, too, and then, gentlemen, to be attacked and abused by a rabble after such a loss was adding insult to injury."

"And that is the reason why I seldom enter Old Hickory in a race now."

"You understand, gentlemen, we sporting men run race-horses to make money out of them, for it costs money to keep up a racing stable, but a horse that is so uncertain that you can't tell whether he will try to run or not, is a mighty poor piece of property to risk your money on."

"I gave a good price for the beast, and I am holding on to him, hoping to get somebody to buy him, but I am afraid his reputation is so bad that no sporting man will care to invest in Old Hickory."

"He is just the horse for my purpose, though, I imagine," Joe Phenix observed.

"Oh, yes, on our track here or on the road it takes a first-class horse to run with him, and then he comes of 'four-miler' blood, and never gives out."

"I bought him down in Orleans, after he had won a four-mile race—three heats, too."

"And now, there's another point," the detective observed.

"It is important that the hoofs of the horse be muffled so that no noise will be made. I have to follow a party, and it is particularly desirable that the game shall not suspect that he is being tracked."

"Well, now, hang me if I can't fit you out to the queen's taste!" exclaimed the old colonel, bringing his hand down with a hearty slap upon his knee.

"There was a crazy sort of a chap along here a while ago with some rubber horse-shoes which

he had invented, and in order to get rid of the fellow I took a sett, although I didn't take any stock in his claims that they were going to knock the old style out of the market."

"Yes, I have heard of such a thing, although I never happened to see any of them," the chief remarked.

"I understand that there are a half a dozen different kinds; some of 'em may be good for something, but this kind I have got isn't."

"It's too soft, never'll stand the wear and tear in the world, but for your purpose they are just splen id, for they deaden the sound of the hoof-strokes so that on an ordinary country road a horse going at a good rate of speed will not make any more noise than a man."

"That is exactly what I want," Joe Phenix remarked.

"I am on the track of a shy bird, one who is easily alarmed, and if he should discover that he is being followed the game would be up immediately."

"Old Hickory with the patent shoes will fill the bill, and no mistake!" the aged sportsman asserted.

"And now, if you gentlemen will take a turn with me to the stables, you can see the horse and the shoes."

"It will only take a few minutes to get the beast ready for the road, for the horse has on an old pair of shoes which by right ought to have been pulled off a week ago."

Piloted by the veteran the superintendent and the detective were conducted to the box stall where the race-horse was quartered.

Old Hickory was a powerfully built bay who looked to be every inch a racer.

And upon the visitors remarking to this effect the veteran sportsman beaved a sigh.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "if the brute could only be depended upon; if he would only do on the race-track what he can do on our track here, so that the men who know him would be safe in backing their judgment, I would make a big stake out of him in a single year."

"But as it is, he is such a regne that when we put our money on him he will not try to win, and then when we let him go without risking a cent on him, he pulls the race off in a canter."

"He's just what you want, eh, Joe?" said the superintendent.

"Yes, he'll suit, all right," the detective answered.

Then General Mack called one of his stable-men and the horse's iron shoes were removed, and the patent rubber ones substituted.

When this was done the horse was saddled and bridled and then the detective mounted him.

Phenix, to his other accomplishments, added that of being a good rider, so he felt completely at home in the saddle.

"You'll find him as aisy a baste as yo iver rode," the groom observed, knowingly.

Ten minutes after, the superintendent, in his buggy, and Joe Phenix, riding Old Hickory, were on the road.

The pair parted when they came to the cross-road which led to Little Silver.

"I will telegraph to New York the moment I get back to the Branch so as to have everything smooth for you there," the superintendent said; and then he shook hands with Phenix, wishing him all sorts of luck, and the two went on in opposite directions.

CHAPTER XLII.

A NEAT TRICK.

JOE PHENIX began to meditate as he rode along the quiet country road after leaving the superintendent of police.

It was his custom to carefully form his plans as far in advance as possible, and no matter what kind of work it was, he always endeavored to grasp all the details.

And like many men of powerful minds who are debarred by circumstances from holding council with their fellow mortals, he generally put his thoughts into words, communing with himself when he was so situated as to render it certain that there were no eavesdroppers in the neighborhood.

So, on this occasion his thoughts found vent in words as he rode along.

First he looked at his watch to ascertain the hour.

By this time the moon was high in the heavens and as it was nearly at its full all surrounding objects were plainly visible.

"Nine o'clock to the minute," observed the detective as he glanced at the time-piece.

"Well, we have not allowed the grass to grow under our feet, that is certain; and as I shall be in the neighborhood of the Brandon place inside of half an hour, I shall be in ample time, for it is not likely that my gentleman will attempt to do any business before ten or eleven."

"Miss Brandon keeps city hours even though she is in the country, and it will be fully ten before the household begin to retire, and it will take at least an hour for sleep to seal the eyes of the inmates of the mansion."

"My man will calculate in regard to this matter fully as closely and accurately as my-

self, and therefore I must not expect a move on his part until somewhere around midnight."

"Hold on, though!" exclaimed the detective as a sudden thought occurred to him.

"I forgot that it was on the programme for him to start to drive to New York to-night."

"That will necessitate his leaving at a reasonable hour, not later than half-past nine, I should think."

"Of course the fellow's game is only to pretend to go—that is to ward off suspicion if any evil comes to the girl during the night."

"He will not go far though—that is, if he has any design upon the girl, as I suspect—but after getting away will drive to some convenient hiding-place and there wait with the carriage until the favorable opportunity comes to carry out his scheme."

"Clearly then, I must hurry up and get on the ground so as to be in readiness to play the spy upon him."

Upon coming to this conclusion, the detective quickened his horse's pace and soon reached the neighborhood of the Brandon mansion.

Being perfectly familiar with the locality, thanks to his having played the spy in the vicinity of the estate, he knew where an old shed was situated near by, which offered a convenient hiding-place for his horse.

Old Hickory being put in the shed, Phenix stole cautiously toward the house, taking advantage of all the trees and bushes which were in the way to conceal his approach.

As it happened, there was plenty of shrubbery in the neighborhood, and so the bloodhound was enabled to get within a hundred yards of the stable, where there was an unusual bustle for the hour.

The colored men were hard at work harnessing the "trotters," and overseeing the job, "bossing it," to use the common expression, was a tall, thick-set, muscular-looking fellow, dressed neatly in a dark suit, but with the face of a pirate.

Possibly his ferocious expression was mainly due to the short, black beard which completely covered the lower part of his face.

The moment that Joe Phenix set eyes upon the man, the impression came to him that he was no stranger to him.

The detective had a wonderful memory for faces, and it was but seldom that he ever forgot a man after he had once made his acquaintance, no matter how long a time elapsed.

But on this occasion, although perfectly satisfied that the fellow was a man with whom he was acquainted, yet Phenix was unable to identify him.

But he soon came to the conclusion that this was due to the fact that the man was disguised.

The short, black beard was false, as was also the crispy, curling black hair which covered his head.

And while Phenix was puzzling his brain in trying to imagine what the man would look like without the wig and beard, the fellow took it upon himself to reprove the negroes for not making more haste, speaking quite roughly, a fact which both the coachman and the hostler resented, and there was a lively war of words between the three.

This incident gave the detective a clew. The man's voice was not disguised, if his person was, and by the means of the voice Joe Phenix was able to identify the man.

It was Black Dan Gillispy, one of the best known crooks in the country, and as daring a scoundrel as ever "cracked a crib."

"I was not mistaken in my surmise, then," Joe Phenix muttered, when he made this discovery, communing with himself.

"Doc Almayne is up to some crooked business, and the chances are big that I shall be able to spoil his little game."

The horses were at last harnessed to the satisfaction of the pretended coachman, and then he mounted the box and drove to the house, where Almayne made his appearance on the piazza, took leave of Miss Brandon, and got into the coach.

"This is a blind to throw dust in the eyes of the old lady," Phenix murmured, as he witnessed this movement.

"He hasn't any intention of leaving this neighborhood, but I must contrive to follow him in some way and see where he does go."

"He will be apt to take the road toward Eatontown, for it is his game, of course, to make them think he is bound for New York, and I must get round in that direction so as to keep up with the procession."

The acute detective came to this decision the moment he saw Almayne make his appearance on the piazza, and so by the time that the New Yorker got into the vehicle, Phenix had made a detour and hidden himself in a little bit of woodland through which ran the road which he was sure his game would take.

The man-hunter had resolved to adopt a bold course.

When the carriage passed him it was his intention to steal forth and get in the rear of it after the fashion of a schoolboy "hooking a ride."

He hadn't the least doubt that he would be

able to keep up with the vehicle, for it was not likely that the horses would be pushed to any extra speed.

Of course there was the risk of being discovered, either by the driver on the box or the master in the carriage, but when one plays a great game great hazards are to be expected, and the indomitable detective did not doubt that he would be able to accomplish the feat, difficult as it might appear to be.

As he had anticipated, the horses were only going at a slow trot, and Phenix, stealing forth with the stealthy tread of a panther advancing on his prey, had no difficulty in securing a place behind the carriage without the knowledge of either Almayne or the disguised felon on the box.

The carriage only proceeded along the main road for about half a mile, and then turned into a lane which led through a small grove.

In the center of the grove the vehicle halted, and the moment that Joe Phenix perceived that the driver was pulling up the trotters with wonderful quickness, he abandoned his position and sought shelter behind a friendly bush, only a couple of yards from the carriage.

After bringing the horses to a standstill, the driver descended from the box, and at the same time Almayne quitted the carriage.

"Now, then, Dan, you are sure you remember your instructions?" said Almayne, and as he put the question the concealed detective felt a fierce thrill of joy, for he recognized the voice.

There wasn't the least doubt that he had at last run his game to earth.

The speaker was the man with whom he had had such a desperate struggle, and who had so nearly compassed his death.

"Oh, yes; I've got everything down fine, and you kin bet on it," the ruffian replied, confidently.

"I am to wait here until twelve o'clock, and then I am to drive slowly to the swell house which we have just left, taking care not to let the horses make any noise, and when I get to the trees, just this side of the house, I am to wait until you come."

"That is it; and be particular to start at twelve exactly; it will take you about eight or ten minutes to reach the spot, driving slowly, and by that time I think I can do my trick."

"I have left a dose for the girl, and the chances are a hundred to one that she will take it without suspicion, and if she does my plan cannot fail."

And then Almayne departed.

Black Dan reclined leisurely upon the ground, took out a pipe and lit it, enjoyed the smoke for about ten minutes, and then his meditations were rudely disturbed.

With the spring of a tiger Joe Phenix leaped upon him.

CHAPTER XLIII.

IN THE TOILS.

THE drug which had been instilled into the lemonade was so potent that it overpowered the girl's senses almost immediately; she was helpless almost before she was aware that anything was wrong.

How long she remained in such a state she knew not, but when she began to revive and distinguish objects around her, she found she was in a narrow apartment, obscured by gloom, and the sound of working machinery with the splash of dashing waves came distinctly to her ears.

She was apparently moving, yet the apartment in which she sat was stationary.

But just as her mind had recovered sufficiently to reason in regard to where she was, and she had come to the conclusion that she was in a close coach, a voice sounded in her ears.

She had moved and so betrayed to the careful watchfulness of the person who sat beside her that consciousness was returning.

"Not yet—not yet," said the voice, in tones that she remembered only too well. "It is too soon; we are not yet at our journey's end."

And then a strong arm encircled her, and a damp sponge, with the pores filled with some potent, pungent-smelling liquid, was pressed to her nostrils.

The full extent of the horrible situation in which she was placed flashed upon her.

She had been drugged and abducted!

And she was not ignorant, either, in regard to the author of the outrage, for she had recognized him by the tones of his voice.

She tried to struggle—to cry out, but the strong arm fettered her as though she was in a vise, and the powerful drug applied to her nostrils quickly stole her senses away.

Again she relapsed into helplessness—completely in the power of her abductor.

When consciousness returned the scene had changed.

She was in a brilliantly-lighted, luxuriantly-furnished apartment, reclining in an easy-chair, as comfortable as a couch.

Where was she?

She looked around her, conscious that she had been the victim of a terrible outrage, and yet unable to guess why she was attacked, for she had not a foe in the world to her knowledge.

Her eyes fell upon a man seated in a great

arm-chair, a few paces from her, his eyes fixed with an earnest gaze upon her face.

There was a strange, mocking smile upon his features, and as the astonished girl gazed upon him a horrid truth flashed suddenly upon her.

She had recognized him at the first glance.

It was the New York gentleman who had been introduced to her by Miss Brandon only a few hours before.

Then his face had seemed familiar to her, and she had been puzzled to account for it, for she could not remember ever meeting him before, but now, like a flash, the problem was solved.

This was the man who had so boldly abducted her from the deck of the steamer.

A sickening sensation came over her; again she was helpless in the power of one, who if not a maniac, was a very fiend in human form.

She closed her eyes as if to shut out the horrid sight, and a convulsive shudder shook her frame.

The captor noticed the movement, and he laughed outright. A low, cunning laugh, utterly devoid of merriment, but full of menace.

Again the girl shuddered.

"No need of closing your eyes," he remarked. "I am here all the same, though you shut me from your sight. You cannot get rid of a disagreeable fact by so simple a process as merely closing your eyes to it."

Our heroine was a brave-hearted girl, one full of resolution, yet so intense was the terror inspired by this extraordinary man, she felt as weak and powerless as a puny child.

The feeling that possessed her was akin to the horrible fright which would have seized upon her if in some woodland glade she had stepped suddenly upon a slimy serpent and then beheld the reptile raise its crested head to strike.

This man seemed to her to be more than human. The boldness of his attacks and the success which had attended them astounded her.

From the first she had escaped as though by a miracle, but would Heaven again interpose its mighty arm in her behalf?

She endeavored to collect her thoughts; no easy matter now that she fully understood her position, and besides, her brain was still whirling from the effects of the powerful drug which had been administered to her by the abductor.

With a great effort she endeavored to appear calm, striving not to betray the fear to which she was a prey.

She opened her eyes and looked her captor full in the face.

"Good! that's a brave girl!" he exclaimed. "There's nothing like making the best of a bad bargain, and to boldly confront a danger at once reduces its extent. I think I perceive that you recognize me."

"Yes."

"But you did not when we met in the country."

"No, although I knew your face was familiar, yet I could not remember where I had seen you."

"It was not strange, for I disguised myself materially when I assumed the role of the half-witted Frenchman; but how is it that you recognize me now, when your memory did not serve you then?"

"Because you no longer attempt to control your features—you have thrown off the mask, and any one who has ever once seen your fiendish smile would never be apt to forget it!" she exclaimed.

Again the man laughed, for the speech pleased him.

"You are right," he remarked, "a victim once transfixed by my eyes seldom forgets the experience."

"But what is the meaning of this terrible outrage?" exclaimed the girl, hotly, unable to restrain herself. "How have I ever injured you—what do you intend to do with me? I have nothing—I am nothing—why, then, do you persecute me?"

"Faith! it fairly rains questions!" he cried, with the shrill laugh that so disagreeably affected the girl. "It may not be so easy for me to answer the questions as it is for you to ask them. In the first place I am not sure that I can give you my reasons. Look in my eyes—do you see anything odd about them?"

"Yes, there is a strange glitter and glare as if you were not in your right mind," she answered, promptly.

"That is exactly the thought that comes to me sometimes, and I sit and ponder over it; am I crazy, or am I not? In my actual self—for, as you have doubtless guessed, I lead two lives, and they are almost as widely separated as the poles—I know I am all right, and I challenge any one to point out a blemish; but in the other, when I give my fancy full rein, I am either mad or else a demon, yet if I am mad, like Hamlet, there's method in it."

"I have not sought you just by chance, but through deep design. When my mad fit is on me I am reckless as to the consequences; the wilder and more daring the scheme that comes into my head the better I like it."

"Your life is shrouded in mystery. You see I know more of you than you think. You came a stranger here to meet strangers, but I stepped in between."

"The fury of the elements tore you from me, but the chapter of accidents again brought us together, and eagerly I snatched at the chance."

"Again you are in my power, and this time I fancy you will not escape until my purpose is accomplished."

"Girl, it is written in the stars that you must become my wife."

She started in horror.

"That surprises you, eh?" he continued. "Well, I suppose it is rather startling, being so entirely unexpected, but that is the way, it is the unexpected that always happens."

"But such a thing will not happen!" she exclaimed, her anger rising at the cool assurance of her captor.

"It will happen within the next month as surely as you are a living, breathing woman. Reflect for a moment upon the position you occupy," he replied, calmly. "You are here in my power, utterly helpless. No one knows that you are here, and your friend in the country will not be apt to trouble herself to search after you, for when she discovers that you are missing she will also find she is minus some valuable pieces of jewelry, and the supposition in her mind will naturally be that you have absconded with the trinkets. I was careful to arrange this little matter. As it stands, Miss Brandon, in disgust, will look upon you as a snake which, after being warmed to life, turned upon and stung her benefactor."

"Oh, you are a demon!" Lesbia cried, horrified at this revelation.

"Yes, to those who attempt to cross me in my way. It is necessary for certain purposes that we become man and wife. There isn't anything romantic about the affair. I am not at all in love with you, and I don't expect you to profess any affection for me, but you must be my wife, and I haven't any doubt that we will get along just as well as the majority of married folks."

"I will never consent!"

"Oh, yes, you will! I shall tame you into submission. You are as securely a prisoner here as though you were immured in a dungeon a hundred feet beneath the earth's surface. I shall starve you until you consent. Neither food nor water shall pass your lips until your proud spirit is broken. Ten hours for reflection I give you and then I will come again."

With this Almayne quitted the apartment, closing the door carefully behind him. It was fastened by a powerful spring-lock.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HUNTED DOWN.

THE apartment into which Almayne entered was the one to which we before introduced the reader: the library, where the consultation between the scheming doctor and the treacherous Culpepper had taken place.

A tray containing a decanter of brandy and some glasses was on the table.

Almayne sat down in his favorite seat, a leather cushion arm-chair, and helped himself to a glass of the potent liquor.

"Aha! that's the stuff!" he exclaimed; "that puts new life into a man. I do not exactly understand it, but, somehow, I don't feel as well as I ought to under the circumstances. Everything is progressing as well as I could possibly wish. I have succeeded in all my designs, and unless some evil genius rises to snatch my prize from me my fortune is made. The girl will consent to the marriage in time, and if she does not I will so weaken her down with drugs—so enfeeble her mind that when the time for the ceremony arrives she will be but little better than an idiot, and will not have sense enough to resist. All I am afraid of is myself. I am half mad at times; I know it; I am quite conscious when the spell comes on, and then I am a perfect wild beast, hungry for blood and slaughter. But will not the time come at last when the mind will give way and the madness become permanent? That will be an interesting study. Many men are crazy more or less, but few of them are aware of it, as I am, and fewer still capable of calmly waiting and watching its development."

He took another glass of brandy.

"What is the matter with me?" he exclaimed. "I am nervous and ill at ease. Is there some danger impending? That old tramp! that fellow inspired me with fear. If I were not sure that Phenix perished beneath the waters of the North River, I should have suspected that the tramp was he in disguise. The man-hunter is dead—and the dead do not return."

Hardly had the words left his lips when from behind a Japanese fire-screen which stood in a corner of the room rose the figure of the old tramp, a cocked and leveled revolver in his hand.

"Does not the Phenix always rise from its ashes?" he asked, at the same time removing his wig and beard and displaying the resolute features of the detective.

Almayne sunk back in his chair with a convulsive gasp. He realized the situation upon the instant.

"Do not attempt to resist," continued Phenix,

coming from behind the screen. "The house is filled with police; your two confederates are in our hands, and in order to save themselves they have made a clean breast of it. You didn't finish me the other night as you thought, for as I came to the surface of the water I saw you returning and I conjectured that you had an idea of making an end of me, and as I wasn't in a good condition for any more fighting, my revolvers being useless from the ducking, I took advantage of the fact that your back was to me to crawl out and hide among the rocks."

"But I lost your trail though, all the same, and only struck it again by an accident. I was employed by Lamardale to find this girl, Lesbia, and when I discovered that she was under Miss Brandon's protection I assumed a disguise in order to ascertain exactly how matters stood, and so was lucky enough to stumble upon you, and I recognized you that time, Almayne, although you fooled me completely when you were disguised as a woman."

"The game was up then, for I felt sure you were the man who tried to abduct the girl from the steamer, and I reckoned you would try it again."

"When you carried off the girl in your coach I followed you on horseback, having previously warned the police by telegraph."

"That coach, with the trap door in the floor by means of which you were enabled to leave the bodies of your victims wherever you pleased, with little danger of detection, is in our hands."

"The cloak you sometimes wore which gave you the appearance of a gigantic bat, and so inspired credulous souls with terror, we have also captured, together with sundry valuables, the property of the men so fiendishly slain by you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Almayne, suddenly recovering his composure. "I played a bold game, didn't I? It was easy enough in my disguises to entrap my victims. They entered the house on one street, met their doom there, then were carried to the stable in the rear on another street, placed in the coach, and their bodies thus easily disposed of."

"Probably you have suspected that at times I am not exactly in my right mind."

"I have, for only a demon or a madman could accomplish such deeds of blood," replied the detective.

"My particular craze, when the fit came on, was to believe I was a vampire, one of those fabulous creatures who live on human blood. I slew my victims, and then pricked them in the neck with the dagger-point just as if the vampire's teeth had bitten there."

"I have reason for my madness, too—reason to hate all the world."

"I was reared as the scion of a wealthy Creole family, but when I returned from Europe to claim my estate on the death of my parents, I discovered that I was naught but a penniless beggar, the child of a quadroon slave. The blow drove me mad. I was sent to an asylum, where I was treated in the most cruel manner."

"At last my reason returned to me, and I was discharged cured. From that time I have preyed upon my fellow-men as mercilessly as any wild beast."

"When you got upon my track I feared the worst, and so I tried my utmost to kill you. Fate is against me, and to it I yield."

"You have stopped me right at the moment of success. The girl, Lesbia, is to be the old banker's heiress. I was going to marry her, kill Lamardale, and so clutch his fortune. But you will not bang me, though, for I am crazy."

"So reasoned another great criminal, but the law took his life nevertheless," exclaimed Phenix.

"It will not take mine, for I am already dying. Like the scorpion when driven to bay, I sting myself to death!"

He held up his left hand, upon the little finger of which gleamed a heavy ring.

"This is the poison ring of the ancient Borgias!" he cried, wildly. "A slight pressure drives its poisoned fangs into the hand it touches. See! thus do I defy your malice!"

He clasped his hands before the detective could spring forward to prevent it.

Wildly he laughed, and rising, brandished his hands in the air, waving the detective away.

Almost immediately the powerful poison took effect.

"I feel it sapping the life within my veins!" he cried. "No scaffold-beam, no hangman's rope for me! Phenix, accursed man-hunter, my blood is on your head—in death I defy thee!"

Almayne sunk back in the chair; a few convulsive gasps and the secret slayer was beyond the ken of the law.

He was dead.

A few more words and our tale is told.

Lesbia was conducted by Phenix to the house of the banker, and there Lamardale explained that it was through him that she quitted England.

Then came the story of the marvelous adventures that had befallen the girl since her arrival in the New World, and Phenix, thanks to the revelation made to him by the baffled villain, was able to explain the motive which had

caused Almayne to so persistently prosecute the maiden.

Miss Brandon's kindness to the unfortunate girl was also made known to Lamardale, and the banker was greatly affected.

"A coldness has existed between that lady and myself for over twenty years on your father's account," the banker said. "My unfortunate brother, whose rashness not only wrecked his own life, but also rendered miserable all connected with him.

"Yes, my child," he continued, "your father was my brother Robert. Mardol is but Lamar-dale, shortened. Miss Brandon must be summoned, for now I can explain everything."

Brief and sad was the story of Robert Lamar-dale.

Even while engaged to be married to Miss Brandon he became infatuated with another woman, married her in secret—was supposed by her brothers to have betrayed her, and they waylaid him. In the struggle one of the brothers was killed by Robert, and to avoid the consequences of his crime he fled to foreign parts and there assumed another name, and to the day of his death never dared to return to his native land or allow any one to know he lived, the banker excepted, for it was he who aided the fugitive to escape.

When Miss Brandon heard this story she was satisfied that it was the hand of Heaven that had led her to Lesbia, the love she bore the father had descended to the daughter.

The banker knew naught of the lady whom his brother had married abroad, and fearing that Robert had again made an unfortunate match was resolved not to let the child, the issue of the marriage, know of the bright fortune in store for her until he had ascertained she was worthy of it.

But Lesbia was a paragon of a woman, as Miss Brandon declared, and the banker soon learned to love her as if she had been his own child.

Blount, like the worthy, honest fellow that he was, deemed the now wealthy girl a prize too great for him to aspire to gain, but Lamar-dale speedily reassured him on this point.

"You were her steadfast friend when fortune frowned; do not forsake her now that she is again in the sunshine!" he exclaimed.

Thus encouraged, Blount persevered, and rumor whispers that soon the wedding will take place.

Almayne, the secret player, the "crank" who essayed in these, our modern times, to play the role of a vampire bat, being hunted down, the mysterious murders ceased.

The particulars of the affair were never made public, for it is the policy of the police to suppress such things, lest the example might tempt others to tread the self-same bloody road.

The man-hunter, no boaster, kept his own counsel, but in all his adventuring career no episode reflects more credit upon Joe Phenix than his tracking to death the Bat of the Battery.

THE END.

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